CHINA IN LEGEND AND STORY

C. CAMPBELL BROWN

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China in legend and story

CHINA

IN LEGEND AND STORY

'The heavens are still: no sound.
Where then shall God be found? . . .
Search not in distant skies;
In man's own heart He lies.'

SHAO YUNG.

Translated by H. A. GILES.

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TEMPLE OF CONFUCIUS.

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CHINA

IN LEGEND AND STORY

BY

C. CAMPBELL BROWN

FLEMING H. REVELL COMPANY
NEW YORK CHICAGO TORONTO
1907

TO

L. C. B.

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PREFACE

THESE stories come from the heart of a Chinese city. The printed page cannot create memories of living faces, gestures, turns of voice and movements of the hand, nor their background, here the corner of a house or temple court, there a stretch of dusty road or the distant skyline lifted clear against the heavens. There exists no achromatic medium through which to show the men who told the tales or lived them out before the writer's eyes. Nor, failing such a magic lens, is it possible to borrow the cinematographic presentation with which the Chinese raconteur makes his hearers see both men and things as in a moving picture. This being so, the stories have been told as simply as possible, in the hope that their original interest may not have been wholly lost in the telling.

The scene of the events recorded in the tales lies in the hilly country of southern Fukien, where the famous old-world city of Chinchew stands, Quemoy, the Island of the Golden Gate, described

in 'Love Stronger than Death,' being one of the most easterly portions of the province.

A residence of ten years in that part of China gives the writer some reason to hope that the local colour of the narratives is fairly accurate. The scenery of the country shares in that power of fascination possessed by its people and its literature. Strange at first, it steeps itself into the mind, and deepens the original impression at every contact with the eye—the southern mountains with scattered verdure clinging to their harsh sides; the rice plains Nile-green, or brown and breathing musty ripeness, according to the season; the grey walls, bridges, and pagodas of Chinchew; the farm upon the mountains where the idols met their fate; the red brick village of Tan-tay; and the room in which the 'Strong Runner' finished his last lap.

A word or two may perhaps be said as to the tales themselves. The first of them, 'Jephthah's Daughter,' stands very much as it was told by a member of one of the oldest literary families within the city. 'The Gamin Scholar,' 'Love Stronger than Death,' and 'The Tao-tai's Seal,' are specimens of stories current among the people. The incident of 'The Bronze Antique' was recounted by the son of the man who bought the tripod. 'Base

Metal' is a narrative obtained from a friend much interested in the history of the local families; it was confirmed and slightly added to by a former servant of the Intendant's, who supplied the description of the great man's personal appearance. 'The Khai-Goan-Si' is a sketch of what may be called the Notre Dame of Chinchew—the heathen heart of the city—and is an attempt to give some idea of the place the temple holds in the local landscape both visible and invisible. The legends employed in it, amongst which the Chinese form of the Roman ox-hide story is of peculiar value for students of folk-lore, have been collected from various individuals among the literati, artisans, and shopkeepers. Such local indications as may be traced in inscriptions, or the tablet above the main door with its two characters meaning 'Red Cloud,' and the cracked and blackened stonework in the lower courses of the pagodas, have also helped the story. 'The Eleventh Hour' is an attempt to reproduce an intensely vivid impression that remains in the writer's memory. The conversation has been recorded in terms familiar to Western thought, lest the reader's attention should be diverted by unfamiliar phraseology from the essential facts. 'Transformation' was told the writer

by Eng-peh, one who as a boy was severely reprimanded by his teacher for leading the then disreputable beggar through the streets of An-hai. This interesting informant, one of 'the old guard' of Fukien Christianity, was the man who afterwards had his clothes torn from his back, when the house first occupied by Song-peh and his friends in Chinchew was looted. Nor is it possible to think that chance alone induced the old man to repeat this narrative, during what proved to be the last visit which he was to pay his friend on earth. The tale, which interested those who heard it so much that it was committed to writing at the time, was afterwards confirmed by the accounts of other people who knew something of the chief actor in early days. 'The Strong Runner' is drawn from materials supplied by the hero himself, and his friend Tek-tsu-peh, the second member of the party which climbed the mountain and explored the city. Some further details have been added to their narratives by means of facts obtained from the letters of Dr. Carstairs Douglas, the foreigner who figures in the story. The remaining eight tales are concerned with people personally known to the writer, and are sketched from the life.

The object of this book is to show how Chinese people live and think, first when they are heathens, and afterwards when they are Christians. It is an attempt to give a real picture of the native mind and character, as seen to some extent from the inside. Nothing has been extenuated, nothing set down in malice. Some may think perhaps that the point of view maintained in the tales is too friendly to the heathen Chinaman; others, that less than justice has been done to him: but it is enough to know that whatever has been true to fact will stand; the rest may go—indeed, the sooner it goes the better.

The Author wishes to take this opportunity of acknowledging his indebtedness to Professor J. Gibb, D.D., Cambridge, the Rev. J. H. Oldham, and Mrs. Freeland Barbour of Edinburgh for helpful criticism and advice. His best thanks are due to Mr. R. J. Whitwell, Oxford, for invaluable aid in preparing these pages for publication, also to the Rev. George Steven, Edinburgh, who has most kindly read the proofs, and to various friends who have placed photographs at his disposal for the illustration of this book.

EDINBURGH, 1907.

CHINA

IN LEGEND AND STORY

I

HEATHEN LIFE: THE MATERIAL

I. JEPHTHAH'S DAUGHTER

CHINCHEW stands in the midst of a cultivated plain. To the north of it the Clear-spring Mountain and the Breasts rise like a barrier, and on the west lies the mass of Tui Soa, its clean-cut peaks and ridges showing clear against the sky. The wall of the far-seen city rules sharp lines upon the landscape, and above them its great central pagodas stand dreaming of ancient days.

The New Bridge,—with its gates and fortalice, its curtain wall and drawbridge, its boat-shaped piers and slabs of granite, its balustrades and Buddhist shrines,— by which the traveller approaches the southern gate of the city, was fresh

from the workman's hand upon the day of which our story tells.

In bygone times, the earthen rampart of the original settlement, with its crowning barricade of thorns, had been replaced upon a wider scale; but now these defences, already too limited for the increasing population, had been removed in their turn, only the four gates being left astride the lengthened streets to serve as watch towers for the city, while far beyond them a forty-foot stone wall, broad enough for a chariot to be driven along the top, and nearly ten miles in circumference, secured the place.

His Excellency Ong Sip-peng, the builder of the new Chinchew, was in perplexity; walls, temples, and bridges had risen beneath his hand, and the city, with its paved streets and ordered houses, its canals and carefully constructed drainage system, its yamens and sculptured pagodas, stood complete. Many obstacles had been swept aside by the great administrator in the course of his labours, but now, at the moment of achievement, an unlooked-for difficulty stood in the path. The wall was finished and the gates set up, but a sacrifice could not be found to 'cease the work.' Had the victim required by

the ancient usage been but a heifer or a sheep, it would have taken little trouble to provide it,—even a human sacrifice might have been procured from the crowded prisons,—but the offering called for was different from these. The immemorial rite demanded that a young virgin 'without shoes or dress' should worship at the altars of the spirits of the city, laying herself down afterwards upon the new-built wall, a living sacrifice in behalf of the people. Alas! no maiden could be found, none of the inhabitants being willing to give a daughter for such a service.

The Governor was dismayed. His proclamations hung unheeded on the yamen walls. The citizens, torn between fear and selfishness, watched one another, each hoping that someone else might make the sacrifice which he himself refused. The slighted gods would surely smite them. Swift and terrible would be their vengeance if no substitute were found. The fountains would burst among the hills and the springs deep in the river-bed would boil as the Dragon of the flood stirred up the waters; then the river would overflow, covering the plain and sweeping the city; or thunderbolts would fall, flinging the

red banner of destruction over the flaming houses; or plague, the flail of death, would strike their homes.

The days passed, and men sat waiting each in his own house.

At last, however, a virgin was discovered willing to bare her young body and make the offerings needful for the peace of the city. Ong Sip-peng's perplexity was at an end, but grief had fallen upon his home, for his own daughter was to undergo the dreaded ordeal. The yamen stood silent, and the city sat abashed and solitary. People were lonely amidst their friends, and little business was done in the market-places. The sound of voices was hushed at the wells and the women put no flowers in their hair.

On the day appointed for the 'offering of surcease' folk were stirring at the dawn and soon the whole city was in the streets.

Slowly through the crowded thoroughfares the procession made its way, as the officials, attended by troops of soldiers, escorted the maiden from the yamen to the wall. It was a scene to make April in men's souls, the sun glancing on weapons and armour and the insignia of magisterial state, touching the robes of horsemen and the em-

CHINCHEW WALL.

broidered furniture of their horses, and kindling each coloured pennon in its rays, whilst tears were falling.

Ong Sip-peng and his suite took up their position near the altars on the wall. To right and left the ramparts were thronged, and the neighbouring streets, as well as the roofs of houses and temples, were covered with people.

There was a sound of trumpets. The brazier fires were kindled, and, as the smoke rose upon the clear air, the girl came forth clothed only in her shrinking womanhood. The rough-hewn granite bruised her feet, and she bent and trembled beneath the eyes of multitudes. To the Eastern maiden, sheltered as she had been from childhood against the public gaze, it was an hour of fierce distress, this ordeal of shame. Her own nakedness clung about her limbs and blistered them, like the fabled dress of stinging nettles. With brimming eyes and shaking fingers she served the altars, ordering fruit and flowers and incense in seemly fashion and arranging the offerings of food. When all was finished she paused, whilst silence held the breathless people. She turned herself, looking hither and thither, as if about to flee, then she faltered, dazed with fear and strange

sorrow, and the pity of her dark hair fell about the rounded girlish shoulders. The women covered their faces and wept. Then, shaking with terror, the girl lay down upon the wall, surrendering herself to whatever fate the unseen gods might lay upon her.

Again the trumpets sounded; the sacrifice was at an end, but a sudden access of shame took the maiden, and, unable to fight against her trouble longer, she rushed to the battlements, and threw herself from the wall. Life had left the lithe young limbs when they found her broken body beneath the ramparts. The ransom was complete, and the city-builder, stricken at the moment of his triumph, got him home again with his dead.

Ong Sip-peng, like the princely T'angs and all the 'fire-led house of Sung,' has passed away.

> 'We are no other than a moving row
> Of magic shapes that come and go
> Round with the sun-illumined lantern held
> In midnight by the master of the show.'

But the grey city, once so fair, recalls the ancient days; the legend of its builder haunts the moldering wall, and the incomparable virgin woe of the maiden who redeemed it will linger long after its battlements have fallen.

The tide of human life, heavy with sin and misery, has flowed for centuries without cessation through its ancient streets, but of all the lives that have come and gone in them, there has been none more exquisite for sorrow or for shame than hers. Many have come and gone and been forgotten, but against the darkness of the heathen night the figure of a nameless girl stands out in beauty, and across the ages her agony still calls to far Gethsemane.

II. THE KHAI-GOAN-SI

CENTURIES ago there was great excitement in the city. Holy men from the West had come seeking land on which to raise a shrine for their religion. The feeling, shared by all the Chinchew people, was at its height within the house of Mr. Nng, upon whose lands the strangers had fixed their choice. Mr. Nng, naturally averse to parting with his property, refused to let it go, but the Emperor of that time favoured the monks, who well knew how to make full use of the influence thus accorded them to sway the minds of those with whom they had to do.

The leader of the Buddhists passed many an hour urging with fluent speech the claims of his religion, and dwelling on the lasting merit to be acquired by one who should give up earthly possessions for the furtherance of sacred ends. Had not the Emperor Ming-ti dreamt of a golden image which appeared to him, heralding the coming of

teachers from the West? Was not the advent of the servants of Buddha a plain fulfilment of the vision? The case was put with skill, but Mr. Nng remained unmoved.

"Well," exclaimed the holy man one day, "I shall argue no more of this matter, but you must know that you refuse my plea at peril to yourself. I go," he added, shaking his patched robe as he rose from his seat, "and you are glad to see me go, but remember that if you wish me to return, you may not call for me unless you change your mind and honestly repent of your refusal."

"Why should 'the chariot'[1] halt again at this poor hut?" said Mr. Nng lightly. "Another visit would indeed be too much honour for the younger brother to support."

Shortly after the priest left the Nng household, the unwilling object of his attentions began to feel a strange depression. A sense of physical discomfort accompanied this lowering of spirits. Presently he was seized by gnawing pains in the stomach. The family doctor was called in, but the remedies which he supplied were of but little use. The pains increased. Mr. Nng's sufferings became acute, and he took to bed. As he lay in torment rolling from side to

[1] A respectful designation by which superiors are addressed.

side upon his mat, the priest's warning came to mind. Could it be that these new gods had power to kill and make alive, to punish men who like himself had slighted them? If it were so, the stranger's threat had been no empty one: his life was now in peril. New fear was added to his pain, and pride gave way to sheer distress. At last, in desperation, Mr. Nng cried out, "O holy man, return and save my life!" He called his servants, "A Sui-ah, Be-ah, Long-ah, quick, send someone to bring back the priest." A shadow darkened the doorway, and the priest entered, his face wearing its accustomed look of imperturbable suavity, but his eyes glittered as he raised their drooping lids.

"What would you with me, O elder brother?" he queried, in level tones.

"Save me from this pain," gasped Mr. Nng, beside himself with agony.

"Do you repent?" said the other.

"My heart is changed, I do repent me of my sins," cried the poor man, getting upon his knees in the bed.

"Drink this then, brother," said the Buddhist, taking a tiny earthen bottle from his pocket, and emptying its contents into one of the teacups which stood upon a table by the bed.

Mr. Nng drank the fluid, and was soon relieved of his sufferings.

"I thought that you would send for me, my brother," said the visitor, as he took a chair and seated himself. His unlucky host murmured something about the overpowering honour his reverence did him by returning to so poor a dwelling. Presently the conversation turned to the unwelcome subject of the property. Though Mr. Nng was in great straits, he fought manfully for his own. The priest was very gentle and persuasive, but, behind the diplomacies of the conversation, the unspoken argument made itself felt. A benefit had been conferred by the stranger, and it had to be paid for. Besides this, Mr. Nng was afraid, and the priest knew it, and Mr. Nng knew that he knew.

"On what conditions will the venerable elder brother bestow some of his ground upon the holy Buddha?" queried the visitor.

"How can the younger brother sin against his ancestors and alienate their lands to gods they neither knew nor served? Yao and Shun did not teach men to worship idols."

"But if Buddha were to approve himself by appearing as of old he did to Han Ming-ti, what then, venerable brother?"

"The younger brother doubts his doing so," said Mr. Nng, with a careless laugh.

The priest, whose face was set and still like the countenance of one of his own idols, made no answer.

Mr. Nng gasped inwardly, for he could not bear the man's fixed look, in which peace was changed to mockery by strange indifference.

That night Mr. Nng had little rest. His sleep was plagued by dreams. The priest pursued him; and amidst the crowding fancies that hung about his pillow, it seemed as if Buddha himself appeared, a shining golden presence, to claim the family fields. There was a restrained emphasis in the priest's tones next morning when he inquired how Mr. Nng had slept during the night. His patient host thanked him with the courteous formality of his race, but felt perturbed. This suave priest, with his chiselled speech and inscrutable ways, was too much for him. Like the spirits of whom the Master spoke, it was better to 'respect him, and keep him at a distance.' In the conversation which followed he made no reference to the dream, but showed a little more attention to the importunities of the wily pleader. The priest now tried a new line of attack, and instead of asking

for a large piece of land as on previous occasions, he pled for a small plot.

"Would the venerable elder brother consent to give as much ground as might be covered by his suppliant's robe?" 'Twas but a little thing to grant, and the gift would bring lasting favour to the giver. Let the cost be weighed but for a moment against the advantages, and no sensible person would hesitate to pay it. Mr. Nng, like a man who respects the dog that has bitten him, had a deferential opinion of the Buddhist's powers; superstition swayed his judgment, and his nerves—even though they were Chinese—were giving way beneath the strain. He conceded a point. "If the presence, whom his reverence worships, really is supreme, let him make proof of it by covering that tree with lotos blossoms," he said, pointing to a spreading banyan near the house.

Next morning the tree was decked with white flowers. "Oh, white lotos blossoms are easily brought forth," said Mr. Nng sturdily, when the unwelcome miracle greeted his eyes. "If the Buddha were to make the blossoms red, that would be a clearer proof of his power." Early next day, when Mr. Nng looked into his garden,

the tree stood resplendent with ruddy bloom. A choking sensation seized him. Despair throttled him with bony knuckles. The lands were slipping from him. He could not explain away the unwelcome evidences thus forced upon him, and when the priest followed these wonders by fresh demands, his unfortunate host, with great reluctance, granted his desire.

"You asked for a small plot of ground, as much as a cloak would cover?"

"Yes," said the priest.

"No larger than the dress you wear?" pursued Mr. Nng, with the caution of a people who are amateur lawyers by nature and necessity.

"No larger than the dress I wear," said the priest, touching the edge of the garment in question. He spoke quietly, but a flash showed black and white beneath the controlled eyelids as they lifted for a moment.

The robe was spread upon the ground, but it would not rest where it was placed, for it rose and floated through the air until it looked like a small red cloud, and as it rose its shadow spread wider over the broad lands below. The owner wept with rage and consternation, and threw himself upon the priest, who had already

begun to mark the outline of the shadow on the fields.

"It cannot thus be done," said Mr. Nng; "I will not give so large a piece of land. This is a scurvy trick, O holy man. The bargain was that you should have as much ground as the robe might cover, not what its shadow covered." The priest said nothing, but, giving Mr. Nng a look that chilled his marrow, raised his hand with a quiet gesture, and the robe came floating down again until it rested on the earth. Then he took it by the edge and began to pull it, muttering words unknown to Mr. Nng and his retainers, who stood by wondering what was next to happen. The robe stretched as the monk pulled it, growing larger and larger beneath the victim's astonished eyes, until at last it covered as much land as the shadow had darkened.

Thus the ground was lost and won, and the first buildings of the famous temple rose upon the ancient holding of the Nngs. They were added to from time to time, as the cult of Buddha spread in the district; and when at length the dynasty of T'ang was overthrown, many people of wealth devoted their property and

their persons to its aggrandisement, rather than let them fall into the hands of the new rulers during the horrors which ensued. So much wealth came to the temple in this way that the number of shrines was largely added to, until more than one hundred were included within the limits of the broad enclosure.

A porchway, in itself a temple, with its black-faced guardian idols, two on each side, half hidden in perpetual shadow, fronted the west street of the city. Beyond this porch the chief court opened vast and still, its grey slabs worn by trackless feet as the centuries went on, and haunted beneath the summer sun by the emptiness of desolation. Cloisters flanked it with masses of cool shade on either side, and dark green banyans threw blue-black shadows upon the pavement; a double line of quaint stone lanterns and lotos flowers led up the centre to a platform of hewn stone, from which the high-roofed main temple towered above the other shrines. Within this building five great idols sat each on its gilded lotos throne, the dream look of a passionless Nirvana on its face. Attendant deities stood by their massive knees, whilst screens of sculptured woodwork curved

behind the shining figures and spread in cloud-like tracery above their heads. Perpetual incense smouldered beneath the dim oil lamps before the central Buddha, while on an altar farther in stood the banzai[1] tablet of the Emperor. Streamers of calico inscribed with pious sentences fell from embroidered valances above, striping the gloom with spectral bands of white. Pillars, each a monarch tree, hewn from forests that since have disappeared, rose from their greenstone pedestals to meet the shadowy rafters, and above them angel figures, bearing alternately a trumpet and a book, supported the tinted ceiling overhead. Beyond this stately sanctuary, with a breadth of grey stone court between, was the shrine of Kwan-yin, our Lady of Mercy, where, in a mystery of carved and painted art, a myriad heads studded the woodwork behind her throne.

But the pagodas, rising from walled enclosures to east and west of these buildings, were the chief glory of the Khai-goan-si; constructed first of timber, then of brick, and last of all from massive blocks of granite, they hung above the city and showed for miles over the countryside. Each stood

[1] This well-known Japanese word is formed from the Chinese characters, 'myriad,' 'years.'

VIEW OF CHINCHEW CITY SHOWING PAGODAS.

on an octagonal platform fenced by balustrades of stone and approached by bridgeways of the same material. The eastern platform, carved with scenes from the legends of early Buddhist missionaries, was more richly wrought than the western one, and was the work of an aspiring 'prentice craftsman who outdid his master and suffered for his ambitious emulation. To right and left of the doorways in each storey the pagodas had gods and heroes chiselled in bas-relief. They were five storeys high, surmounted by fluted roofs and lofty pinnacles of copper fixed by chains of the same metal which acted as stays.

Centuries had passed away since the temple with its towers had been completed. The Emperor of the time, desirous of securing the succession of his newly founded line, had employed a famous geomancer to travel through the empire, examining its contours with a view to discovering spots propitious to the birth of rival claimants to the Dragon throne. On returning from his travels the expert was commanded to present his report in person before the Emperor.

"Did you find any place within our dominions likely to produce a future ruler?" demanded the despot.

"At Chinchew, in the Khai-goan-si, the meanest of the slaves that serve the Son of Heaven has discovered such a spot. For there the contour of the neighbouring hills, the flow of water, and the red earth which forms the soil, provide conditions favourable to the highest promises of fortune. And these natural advantages have been increased by two pagodas which reinforce the propitious influences of the place. It is well-nigh certain that a child of sovereign destinies will be born in that vicinity."

"Where did you find the most unpropitious piece of ground in our empire?" continued the Emperor.

"Outside the eastern gate of the same city there is a spot the fung-shui of which is so bad that it cuts like a pair of shears," replied the specialist. "The family of anyone buried there would be destroyed within a generation."

"We bestow it on you for a grave; you shall be buried there," said the superstitious prince, fearing lest the geomancer should have secretly reserved some special bit of 'imperial ground' for his own burial, to the treasonable benefit of his descendants.

In accordance with an imperial command to destroy the pagodas, quantities of wood, torn from houses pillaged and left empty during the troubles at the recent change of dynasty, were heaped around

the lower storeys, and fired so as to crack the stones and cause the towers to fall. The piles blazed furiously, and volumes of smoke went rolling over the country.

By night the pagodas stood like fiery pillars on pedestals of glowing coal, round which the swaying flames hung banners of demon blue and yellow. But the solid masonry resisted the heat of the burning wood, and the superstitious incendiaries gave up their attempt, not daring to lay sacrilegious hands upon the sacred structures.

Though the Khai-goan-si has lost its former splendour, there is a more than usual stir about the ancient temple on the first day of the year, when, some hours before the dawn, crowds gather in the West Street and throng the entrance. By means of bamboo screens, a space large enough to contain two rows of chairs fronting each other is roughly portioned off at one side of the hall within the porch. Darkness drapes the place from roof to floor and lies upon the courts beyond. Here and there a spark of candlelight tells where itinerant vendors of sweets and other eatables ply their trade among the people, whose appetites are stimulated by the hungry night air.

A chair on bamboo poles carried by coolies and escorted by lantern-bearers comes struggling through the press and stops before the entrance. The crowd sways in the darkness as the people stretch their necks and push each other in a vain effort to see the new arrival. The chair is tilted so as to lower the front poles, and a gentleman steps out and stands for a moment between his servants' lanterns. The excitement dies away again. Waiting is chill work in the dark, but no one leaves, and fresh advents increase the throng. There is a murmur. Several torch-bearers have halted before the porch, driving back the bystanders with a shower of sparks from their flaming brands; an official palanquin swings into the opening thus formed and is lowered with a jerk to the pavement; the great man descends, attendants making way for him as he slowly walks towards the temple, ascends the steps, and takes his seat on one of the chairs within the porch. Another silken palanquin is put down. Officials of lower rank ride up on caparisoned horses. The rows of chairs are filling quickly with magnates clad in robes of state, who rise, with the courteous ceremonial of their order, to receive each new-comer as he greets them before taking his seat.

The crowd, anxious to see all that can be seen, presses closer. Meanwhile time has been passing, and in an hour, or at the most two, the tardy winter dawn will come.

Some attendants leave the porch and place cushions several yards apart from each other so as to form two rows running down the court in front of the main temple: one for the civilians, on the west side; and the other on the east for the military officials. Tripods, in each of which a fire fed by some inflammable material leaps and dances, stand at equal distances upon the temple platform, some forty feet in advance of the building. The doors of the temple are wide open, and a lamp glows above the central altar, where the tablet of the Emperor is placed upon a table beneath the knees of the colossal central Buddha.

The western pagoda swims overhead in the dim sky, a star striking its needle point of light where the curved edge of the topmost storey shows like hewn ebony against the night blue. Beyond the waiting crowd lie breadths of pavement, where the chillness of the morning lurks and shivers. A faint wind stirs uneasily through the cloisters. The corridors are full of memories, elusive, desolate, that pass and hover, refusing to be recalled. Empty

spaces everywhere are peopled as with shadowy multitudes revisiting the places of their ancient solemnities. The glancing light from the platform falls on rows of spectral faces where the people line the edges of the central space.

The last of the officials has arrived. A signal is given: the yamen runners and secretaries push back the people, and the great men leaving their seats pass from the porch into the open court beyond. As they advance to take their places by the cushions, those of higher rank being nearest to the sacred precincts, fresh fuel is cast into the tripods, and the flames leap higher, illuminating the temple front and platform and part of the court. The officers, headed by the Prefect on the one side and by the General on the other, wait motionless, their faces looking north towards the banzai tablet within the temple and the capital beyond it again, where no doubt the object of their reverence is being greeted at the moment by high officials of the court.

It is a glorious bit of spectacular ceremonial: the high-roofed temple with its lamp inside the shadowy doorways; the broad stone platform banded with flame and diapered by flickering black and gold; the figures on the pavement in their robes and furs, the rich red of their state cap fringes gleaming as the

light touches them beneath the banyan branches; the mass of living shadow framing all.

Worship begins. The master of the ceremonies gives the word, calling it out with a long, clear cry. The officials in rows prostrate themselves and strike their heads upon the ground, swinging with regular motion as they bow in unison. Another word of command rings forth, and the motion ceases. Again the master calls, and the double line falls forward. The heads swing rhythmically till the triple ritual of obeisance once more is at an end and the shadowy figures are kneeling upright and still. A voice sounds from within the temple. The master of the ceremonies repeats the word, and for the last time the kowtow, almost majestic in its abandon, is performed.

Again a call, and the figures stand erect. A moment later, the General and Prefect, followed by their assistant functionaries, their respects to the Emperor having now been paid, leave their places, and part with mutual good wishes for the New Year. The silken palanquins disappear, and the crowd makes its way home to breakfast under the paling sky. The ceremonial annual greeting of the Emperor, performed in every city throughout the empire, is over.

Several years ago some strangers visited the Khai-goan-si, where they were courteously received by the monks, who showed them the high-place with its colossal images and the various treasures which the establishment contained. A pleasant chat over some delicious tea, which was handed to them by an attendant, brought their visit to an end, and after saying good-bye to their hosts they left the temple. Scarcely had they returned from their sight-seeing to the place where they were lodging in the city, however, when they were surprised by one of the native Christians, who came quickly into the room where they were sitting, his face strangely white under its yellow skin.

"Have the teachers heard the news?" he asked breathlessly, without waiting for the usual salutations.

"What news, O elder born?—but pray be seated."

"The great idol of the Khai-goan-si has fallen," said the man, still standing near the proffered chair.

"What!—the central image?"

"Yes; the head and shoulders have tumbled, carrying away a hand and one of the knees in their descent."

"Well!"

"Worse than all, the imperial tablet and the altar

on which it stood were broken to pieces by the fall."

"When did this happen?"

"An hour after the teachers left the temple."

"In what way did the elder born hear of this catastrophe?"

"Everyone is talking about it. There is a tumult in the West Street and throughout the neighbouring wards of the city, the people clamouring for vengeance on the foreigners who caused the downfall of the image by their spells."

"Why, no one will really believe that we ever did such a thing."

"Many believe it, saying that you cast magic on the idols when within the temple. Teacher," continued the man, starting forward, "do not remain talking here. You are in danger. Flee to the yamen with your friends, and ask the mandarin to save your lives."

"To save our lives! Surely you are exaggerating the matter."

"Quick, quick! The mob may arrive at any moment to wreck the house."

"Our friend is seriously alarmed," said one of the foreigners to the first speaker in English; "let us make as little of this business as possible. If panic

spreads among the Christians, it will soon be known, and the crowd will be much more likely to attack them and us."

"Don't be troubled, O elder born," continued the other, turning to his Chinese friend. "God will care for us and you, and all will be well."

After vainly pressing the foreigners for some time to seek the shelter of the yamen, the man at last reluctantly departed.

In the evening the Chinaman came back again with a brighter look upon his face.

"The streets are crowded still, but things are not so threatening now," he said.

"You think there is less danger?"

"Yes."

"What has caused this change for the better?"

"The excitement has partly spent itself, and people are more sensible now. Three opinions have been keenly debated by them everywhere. One, that the foreigners destroyed the Khai-goan idol by means of spells, and that they should be put to death in consequence; another, that the fall of the middle idol happening immediately after your visit, betokened that barbarians were about to seize upon the Middle Kingdom; and the third, that what the foreign teachers have been telling men is really true.

The idols are empty, useless things, for when the teachers only went to look at them, meaning no harm, the greatest idol of all bowed his head and tumbled to the ground."

"You think there is less danger, my friend!"

"Yes, for happily the third opinion is gaining ground, and will no doubt prevail in the end."

The grimness of the crisis had passed. A sudden sense of humour swept the city, chasing away the angry feeling which till then had swayed men's minds, and with that lightness which is almost French, the people forgot their malice in a joke. The reaction gathered way and swept on gaily. They made merry as men love to do with fallen idols when they dare. "Buddha was polite indeed. He bowed his head to strangers, and tumbled down in ruins." The people laughed again.

For long there was a yawning gap of shadow at the centre of the row of shining images. In course of time, however, the monks collected several thousand dollars, and after years of waiting the great Buddha was shaped once more in clay upon a wooden framework and sumptuously covered with gold-leaf.

The weight of days is destroying the shrines of the Khai-goan-si, but the main temple stands unbroken between its adamantine flanking towers at

the heart of the city, and the banyan leaves shadow themselves in blue upon the pavement as of old, while stillness waits on creeping desolation. The curse of ancient chicanery and wrong clings to the crumbling walls. Not a finger is moved to stop the process of decay. The surrounding roofs and buildings drop slowly into ruin, sharing in that general neglect of public buildings which at times suffers even the palace of the Emperor and the yamens of his officers to become dilapidated. On dark nights, when the wind rushes under the eaves and heavy rain patters and splashes everywhere, opium smokers, mad for the drug, loosen the supports and tear down beams from the bowing cloisters to gain a coin or two wherewith they may relieve their insatiable cravings.

Nothing is done to guard the place, and despite its many votaries, the downfall goes on more rapidly as the years pass. When all has gone to ruin except the granite pavements and indestructible pagodas, an effort for the restoration of the famous sanctuary will perhaps be made, and it will rise again upon its old foundations—unless, indeed, the fashion of men's hearts be changed meanwhile, and a presence more glorious than appeared in dreams to Mr. Nng claim the ancient temple for His own.

III. THE GAMIN SCHOLAR

MANY years ago a clever, dirty boy of about thirteen, with the habits of a gamin, used to run about the streets of Chinchew whenever he could escape from school. He loved to creep from the stuffy room, where with a score of other boys it was his lot to drone through the bright hours, and stake a cash, if he had one, on throwing dice for cakes and sugar-cane, or dash and shout amidst a group of urchins at the paved entrance to the neighbouring temple. He was a careless creature, never happier than when playing truant in his seedy clothes and cap, an unkempt queue hanging between his shoulders. When caught and driven back to school none looked more foolish or escaped reproof so hardly, for whilst sharper lads made nimbly for the benches, striking into their lessons with a vigorous chant before their seats were fairly taken, he went blundering into his master's clutches, and fared accordingly.

His companions left Chiu—for such was the boy's name—far behind at games, bouncing their cotton balls and whirling many times oftener than he could, before the next hop came, or driving the flying shuttlecock above his head with nimble feet, only to laugh and jeer good-naturedly as he missed his kick, or tumbled down in vain attempts to make the return. He was their butt and boon companion, gauche, kind-hearted, saying silly things; but, when he had a book or pen in hand, although he looked as fatuous as ever, his comrades sang a different song, for none could match him. Exasperated that such an idiot in ordinary life should thus excel them, they would vent their resentment upon the unlucky victor at the close of school. His master's relation to the youth was still more whimsical; while he was tried by his silly looks and childish ways, the almost faultless tasks he brought him filled the good man's heart with pride, and qualms of flattering perturbation seized him as he saw himself outdone by sentences that shaped themselves 'full and hard as bronze' in the compositions of his loose-hung scholar. The questions of the awkward lad also put the dominie upon his p's and q's, suggesting as they did that his ugly

duckling was about to launch on waters where he could not follow.

Chiu, driven at the point of the ruler, distinguished himself in the magistrate's examinations for junior candidates, and was entered to sit for the first degree at the next triennial visit of the Literary Chancellor. When the great man passed through the streets, borne by eight bearers in his green silk palanquin and attended by a retinue of local officers, the lad was deep in the jostling crowds, gaping with the best of them. The city was thronged by scholars of every condition in life, both rich and poor; polished citizens in flowing silks; rough villagers from the hills in robes of cotton homespun; young lads, the red blood still suffusing their yellow cheeks; toothless veterans of the pencil, faint yet pursuing in spite of wrinkles and white hair. These men, some nine thousand in number, accompanied by an army of servants and followers, were added to the population within the walls for the time being, and helped to fill the city to overflowing, whilst waiting to be examined according to their districts in groups of from one to three thousand.

When the day arrived for Chiu's district to enter upon its trials, he was conducted to the examination hall and pushed in trembling within the gates. He

nearly suffered shipwreck at the outset, when being searched for 'sleeve editions' or cribs, answering wildly and looking so unlike a candidate, that had it not been for his credentials, he would have been driven from the place.

Seated at last on the allotted bench, panic took the lad as he looked right and left, where some three thousand men were ranged row upon row in long shed-like buildings, edging a grass-grown stone court. He shifted nervously upon his seat and scarcely dared to lift his eyes to the pavilion at the upper end of the central space, where the Chancellor presided with his secretaries and assistant examiners. An iron gong pealed forth, filling him with fresh perturbation, as two characters from the Four Books, which were to form the subject of the first essay, were hung out upon a board. But he pulled himself together when he identified the passage chosen and grasped the idea to be discussed. As he brushed back his tangled hairs and loosely plaited queue, rubbing down a supply of ink the while, the outline of his essay shaped itself before him. Thus and thus the theme should be enunciated, thus expanded, so it should be turned and countered to the verge of plain denial, thus it

should be twisted back again, reaffirmed, illustrated, and driven home.

By the time the bamboo pen was in Chiu's hand, the fright which had threatened him disappeared, and the clear brain sat regnant over the ungainly body, gathering its powers into play as the essay began to unfold itself. The other candidates, if they noticed him at all, saw only an ill-clad figure, huddled over the bench and a pen that moved steadily, save when raised to dip for ink or to be cleansed from some impurity by a careful blackened finger. None of them could have divined the lad's mind striking swift into the heart of things, shaping its ordered line of thought, and ransacking the world of letters for allusions to 'gild and jade' the phrases of the growing argument. He laughed within his heart; he knew the creator ecstasy. Then his pen stopped and he awoke to find himself sitting cramped and weary, with aching wrist and forehead, the leaves of the finished essay lying on the bench before him.

A slight cough caused Chiu to turn his head at this juncture, and, when he looked, there was crafty Chhoa, an old acquaintance of his, signalling furtively for help. Forgetting the warnings of his teacher and others as to silence, Chiu began to whisper, but

ceased immediately on seeing heads near begin to turn in his direction. On this he wrote a hint or two upon a strip of paper, which he rolled into a pellet and blew along the wooden boards towards his neighbour. Seeing him still sitting in motionless despair, he recklessly began to whisper once more, and just escaped ejection from the building for his pains.

Chiu's father nearly beat him from vexation, when he found him playing chuckstone on the pavement with a group of ragamuffins after the examination. When seized and asked how he had fared in his ordeal, he made silly answers, and the old man let him go in desperation, protesting that one so 'weakly soft' would never make a figure in the world of letters. But when the horizontal notices, with the names of successful candidates arranged in circles on them, were posted in the city, Chiu senior was among the first who went to scan the lists. With heavy heart he searched among the bottom names, and failing to find the one he wanted, was about to go disappointedly homewards, when curiosity led him to look again to see who headed the list. Adjusting his brass-edged spectacles, he examined the list with care; he took them off and rubbed his eyes; he put them on again and stared.

"My grandfather!" he exclaimed in wonder; "Goa!" he shouted in glad astonishment; for he was looking at his own son's name.

The boy was caught upon his father's return and duly impressed with the new dignities which now were his. The blue robe, state cap and girdle, silken boots and tinsel flowers, used by a sew-tsai, or scholar of the first degree, were provided, and he was conducted through the usual ceremonies at the yamens and temples. He was fêted by his friends and made much of, but the old nature remained unchanged, and he hung about as helplessly as ever. His relations, proud as they were of the distinction he had won for the family, could not hide their wondering contempt at times, and even the coolies who carried him in his decorated chair on the ceremonial visits which he had to pay, made merry at his expense.

After this achievement, Chiu studied more carefully than he had done before, and, despite his slovenly ways, astonished his teachers and companions by his work. "He understands at one glance," they would say in the common phrase of the people; "he has all the books in his stomach." Very soon he began to think of attempting the next step in the path of literary advancement. When nearly

ready for this further venture he went with a party of friends on a 'dreaming' expedition to the famous hill shrine of Sangkeh-soa. His companions like himself were students, studying for the second degree and looking forward to the severe test of the examinations at the provincial capital. One or two were men of means, but most of them were poor, and among them was a one-eyed scholar who looked rather down at heel in his patched dress and worn shoes. The temple to which they bent their steps was famous as a place where people passed the night in hopes of finding portents from which they might read their fortunes. The party, after climbing the mountain, reached the temple above a slope strewn with boulders, and passed the night in rude beds arranged like bunks around a squalid room. Next morning it was discovered that whilst the majority, wearied by the march, had slept without dreaming, one of their number had dreamt that an aged scholar with a rugged face had appeared to him, pointing to a sheet of paper on which the symbol for honour was inscribed. This character, like the majority of those used in Chinese writing, is a composite one, being formed by joining several simpler signs together. The first of these components is 't'ung,' which means to hit the

middle, or graduate; this is followed by a single stroke separating it from another symbol beneath, meaning 'knot' or 'eye,' which rests in turn upon two sloping strokes representing 'man.'

When the dreamer mentioned what he had seen, the two men of position among the party were jubilant, concluding that someone who was held in honour and respect would graduate at the approaching examination; the other members of the group, and especially the one-eyed scholar, being correspondingly depressed. Long and keen were the discussions which followed as to the exact meaning of the dream, but, failing to arrive at a unanimous conclusion, the party resolved to write the character upon a piece of paper and ask the first person they met after descending the mountain to interpret its bearing upon their affairs. On reaching the plain, they came upon a man in straw sandals resting by the wayside with a bundle lying on the ground beside him. Greeting him after the friendly fashion of the country, they told him their business, and handing him the paper, asked what conclusion he drew from the character of which their comrade had dreamt.

"But the 'honoured presences' must understand that their despicable younger brother cannot read."

"Let the venerable uncle kindly trouble himself to look at the word written upon this paper; 'tis but a simple one, which everybody knows."

The man looked carefully at the 'character' and then at the faces of the scholars standing round him. "What does this hollow oblong with an upright line dividing it in the middle mean?" he asked, pointing to the top of the symbol.

"It means the middle, or to hit the middle as an arrow striking the target. It also means to graduate or hit the mark at an examination," answered one of the group.

"The presences are about to go to Foochow to be examined, are they not?"

"Yes."

"Then this means that one or more of their number will hit the mark there."

"Goa!" said the men of the long robe, prolonging the full vowels in delight and surprise at so encouraging an interpretation.

"The straight stroke next below means 'one,' does it not?" said the man, moving his finger and pointing immediately beneath the portion just explained to him.

"Correct, O venerable granduncle," said one of

the scholars, promoting the stranger by an increase of seniority in the respectful epithet he used to address him.

"And this square divided by two inner lines below the 'one,' what may it stand for?"

"A knot or eye."

"One eye, one eye," the man repeated, pausing for a moment.

"And these two sloping strokes beneath it again mean 'man,' do they not?" he continued, pointing to the bottom of the character.

"Truly they do, O venerable granduncle."

"One, eye, man." He went over the words slowly.

There was a sudden stir in the group, the scholars turning instinctively towards their companion in the patched gown. The countryman noticed the movement, and, following their gaze, saw that the object of their scrutiny had lost an eye.

"The one-eyed man will graduate," he said, the words almost jumping out of his mouth, so surprising was the coincidence.

When the time approached for the examinations at Foochow, Chiu, in accordance with the time-honoured custom, called upon his friends and received considerable help from them towards the

expenses of the long journey he was about to make. The necessary preparation being completed, he travelled with some other scholars, bound upon the same errand to the provincial capital, each having a bundle of clothes done up in small compass, with writing materials and a few precious books stowed away inside it, every one of them being accompanied by a poor relation, or hired servant, to attend to his wants when he should be a prisoner within the examination hall. The money they had borrowed or collected enabled the candidates to travel most of the stages of their hot journey by chair, and each night they put up together at one of the primitive inns to be met with at the halting-places upon the high road.

Arrived at Foochow, the travellers found quarters at a lodging frequented by Chinchew people, and were very merry together, save when engaged with final preparations or in the schools. Chiu, as usual, was at the centre of the fun. The young sew-tsais laughed at his maladroit ways and speeches, but it was fortunate that he was among good-natured comrades, who, however they might tease him, checked his childish propensities and kept him from wandering off to loaf upon the streets.

AN EXAMINATION HALL.

After the first of the three examinations, at which he had been all but suffocated in the tiny cell allotted to him, our hero employed himself in strolling idly about the city, trying to kill time until the next trials should be due, a few days later.

Now it so happened that on one of these rambles he found himself, along with two or three companions, among a number of the Foochow literati, with whom he fell into a discussion on the writing of essays. The Foochow men, misled by Chiu's uncouth appearance and careless ways, discounted his opinions, and fell to teasing him, maintaining that provincials like himself knew little or nothing of letters. Chiu and his friends on their part retorted that Chinchew, their ancestral city, had produced more distinguished scholars and officials, in proportion to its population, than the city of Foochow. They had a good case, but Chiu put it badly, and got himself laughed at for his pains.

"Chinchew people have no ink in their stomachs. They are white water men," gibed the scholars, playing upon the meaning of the symbols for 'white' and 'water,' which together form the first of the two characters used in writing the city's name.

Stung by a taunt implying that they were illiterate bumpkins, and vexed by the contempt which Chiu's futile speech had drawn upon them, the Chinchew scholars challenged their tormentors to prove the assertions they had made.

"With pleasure," replied the Foochow men in chorus, resolved to teach these country cousins a lesson. "Let a number of your scholars meet an equal number of ours in friendly contest at a place convenient for the purpose. Some disinterested graduate, from one of the prefectures other than Chinchew or Foochow, shall set us a theme upon the spot, and our dispute can then be easily determined from the essays written by your men and ours. The side which loses shall pay a forfeit to the other."

"Done," cried Chiu and his companions, without waiting to consider whether their friends would be willing to join in such a competition or not. It was settled, therefore, to have the meeting next day in a neighbouring building which the Foochow men had at their disposal.

After this encounter Chiu and his companions strolled lazily back to their quarters, where they told their comrades of the dispute and what it had led to. The Chinchew men were disgusted at being

committed to so serious a matter without previous consultation, even the two or three who were parties to the bargain meanly refusing to take part in the contest. On this Chiu, at his wits' end, went from one inn to another in dilatory fashion, still hoping to beat up recruits, but met with scant encouragement. His fellow-citizens looked upon him as a fool, and practically told him so. No one took him seriously. His words had little weight, and when he spoke people did not listen. They laughed when he grew earnest, and sent him limping back to his dog-eared books and guttering oil lamp.

There was a scornful ripple next day when Chiu shuffled into the room appointed for the competition, to find eighteen of the Foochow men ready for the fray. He was the only Chinchew representative to make an appearance, but the local men, considering that an affront had been put upon them, determined to hold the competition and to exact the forfeit by default. Chiu said that for his part he would keep to the compact, and compete as best he might for the honour of his prefecture. When he asked timidly to be allowed to write several essays, if the time allowed, so as to make up for his absent fellow-citizens, and that each of these essays might be pitted against one on the other side, his request

was granted, not without some witticisms on the unlikelihood of his achievements in such a direction.

The subject was given out. Down went the heads, and silence fell upon the busy room. Chiu lost himself in his work, kicking off his shoes as he bent his back over the paper. His mind, stirred by gibes and stung by the defection of his friends, was fully awake perhaps for the first time, and flung itself into the contest. His thoughts, stimulated by the excitement, grew limpid. The pages multiplied beneath his hands. Soon the first essay was completed, and turning to a fresh view of the subject, he plunged into another one. The sentences flowed from his pen. When the second essay was finished he took up the theme in a different aspect and began again. The Foochow scholars, counting upon certain victory, wrote at their ease, and scarcely flung a glance at the huddled figure, which, save for the racing pen, sat almost motionless on the opposite side of the room. On went Chiu's brush, swiftly driving down the lines. He worked, scarce knowing whether it was himself or some other that wrote thus, reproducing upon paper the immediate intuitions of a spirit. Another essay was completed and another, and as each was laid aside he moved

to a different standpoint and discussed the fresh ideas that rose before him.

By this time the Foochow men began to notice that something not quite ordinary was going on at the table where the solitary lad was sitting. They paused in their work to note the hand moving ceaselessly over the paper and the growing pile of essays. "Demon pen," they muttered, half laughing, as they stretched their arms and yawned.

On went Chiu. Some of his opponents having completed their own tasks, strolled over to look more closely at what he was doing. A glance sufficed to arrest their attention. They looked at him and then they looked at each other, standing in amazement like children at a street play. The lad worked steadily without lifting his eyes. Something chivalrous began to stir their hearts, in spite of their previous vexation, as they grouped around the solitary scholar. He was not much to look at, but he had 'a good pluck,' and whatever his work might amount to, where others had flinched, he was fighting single-handed for the literary reputation of his city. The word went round to give him time, and as the day was long, and there was little else to do, the scholars waited with sceptical good-nature, quizzing each other as they smoked their

water-pipes or watched the pages turning one by one.

When at last the limit of the Foochow men's patience was almost at an end, Chiu gathered up his scattered pages and began binding them together with twisted strips of paper for string. One, two, three,—he counted out his essays,—the Foochow men gathered closer,—four, five, six,—their eyes opened as he proceeded,—seven, eight, nine; and so on until, amid invocations of "My father!" "My ancestors!" "My grandfather!" he reached the tale of eighteen, and handed them to the judges chosen to preside upon the occasion.

The surprise of the local sew-tsais shortly afterwards was changed to consternation, when it was discovered that Chiu's essays were better than their own. Deserted by his friends and condemned by friends and foes alike, he had fought for his own hand, and won. The forfeit was paid, and although it was with difficulty that the victor was prevented from wasting it in thriftless ways, the foolish-looking lad had gained for himself an imperishable renown. If the Foochow scholars hardly dared to lift their heads when they met their conqueror, his fellow-townsmen were scarcely less crestfallen as they realised how they had been made a public show

by one whom they had openly despised. His essays were passed from hand to hand, and the scholars laughed with exquisite vexation over the contrast between the force of a transcendent literary gift and the outward slovenliness of its possessor.

Chiu passed his examinations for the second degree along with the one-eyed candidate, and afterwards distinguished himself when he graduated as Chin-su among the highest scholars of the land. The dignities which came upon him thus were not congenial to his disposition. He loved the feasts given in his honour, where he might stuff himself with dainties, but he missed the pleasant freedom of the streets, from which his rank ought to have barred him. Fame brought him fresh vexation, for whilst he failed to profit by his honours, it drew attention to defects which would have passed unmarked among the common crowd.

The Chin-su's monetary dealings were a proverb. On one occasion, having some silver which he wished to keep securely, he wrapped it in cloth and placed it in a hole left by the builder's mould stick in a wall of pounded earth. When he had deposited the money inside it, he covered the mouth of the

aperture with a piece of paper, on which he had carefully written the words: "This hole does not contain fifteen ounces of silver belonging to Chiu the Chin-su."

Some time after he had made this hoard, the good man was found by one of his friends fruitlessly poking the recesses of the hole with a bit of bamboo and pausing at times to peer disconsolately into its depths. Nothing would induce him to tell his neighbours what the trouble was, but for half a day he occupied himself with futile visits to the wall, and only after repeated efforts to solve its mystery did he desist. What might have been expected had happened. The hole was empty. The puerile falsehood had come true.

Our gamin scholar kept his predilection for the gutter to the end, loving to roam the streets on all occasions. When returning rather late at night from one of his vagrant expeditions, he got into trouble; for with more than ordinary carelessness he had forgotten to provide himself with a lantern, thus breaking the ancient rule, by which every reputable citizen is bound to carry a light when walking in the city after nightfall.

Other people no doubt broke the salutary stipulation with impunity, but our hero upon this occasion ran his head against the wall as usual, stumbling carelessly into the midst of a patrol of watchmen.

"Who are you, sir?" queried the officer of the watch.

"It's me," said Chiu, with a nervous laugh.

"Why do you walk the streets without a light?" continued the officer.

"I have been to see a friend, and I forgot to bring a lantern."

"Been to see a friend at this time of night, when all good people are in bed! A strange story," said the man, raising his light that he might scan the stranger's face.

"Hngh," he said, as he lowered the lamp, not at all reassured by this brief inspection, "but why do you creep through the streets without at least a torch, as though you were about some doubtful errand?"

"Been to a gambling den," volunteered one of the watch.

"Going to break into some house, more likely," said another of the men.

"Take him to the lock-up," cried the officer.

"But, but——" protested Chiu, all his wits flying from him in his extremity.

"Give him a beating if he objects," said the officer, and with a whack the poor fellow was quickly overpowered and dragged away.

When Chiu was brought before the authorities, his disreputable looks, and the figure which he made when under examination, so damaged him that he was ordered a beating. Just as he was about to be laid under the bamboo, however, he happened to let fall a casual remark about his elder brother, muttering half to himself, "I wonder what people will say when they hear that the brother of a Chin-su has got himself whipped in this fashion?"

"Stay!" cried one of the police. "This man says that his brother is a Chin-su; we had better take care."

Upon this Chiu was led back into the presence of the superior officer to be examined again.

"Did you say your brother was a Doctor of Letters?"

"Yes, of course," said Chiu, naming him.

"What, the famous graduate!" exclaimed the

officer, starting on hearing the name of one of the most influential personages in the city.

"If you had only told us so before, we would not have brought you here," cried the functionary, vexation mingling with surprise as he began to tremble for his own skin.

"I did not think of telling you," said Chiu, with a foolish smile.

"But, venerable sir," said the man, becoming respectful, "if your brother is a person of such position, how comes it that you walk the streets in the dark without a servant, and dressed—forgive my saying so—like a beggar?"

Chiu chuckled and made irrelevant remarks.

"Well, then, what are you yourself?" queried the officer, inclined to be doubtful in spite of his apprehensions. "What do you do?"

"I read books," said the captive simply, looking as if he 'did not know the character for heaven.'

"Are you a scholar?"

"Yes."

"Oh, venerably great one, we did not know it when we seized you," said the watchmen with one voice, realising what a coil they had got themselves into by striking a member of the privileged class

of literati, who could not legally be struck or beaten.

"Do not vex yourselves about the matter," said Chiu, in a wandering way. "I forgot also to tell you that I am a Chin-su myself."

The astonished head of the patrol rose from his seat on hearing this remark, and stood with servile protestations beseeching the 'great man's' mercy, for he knew full well the reprisals of which he stood in danger and the power of injury possessed by scholars like Chiu, in a land where high attainments bring an almost princely influence to their possessors. The watchmen prostrated themselves upon the floor. "Never mind," said our hero amiably; "send a torch-bearer to convoy me home, and you will hear no more of this night's proceedings."

Chiu lived in his native city, the inconsequence of his ordinary doings unredeemed even by the unquenchable light of genius. Possessed of ample qualifications for the highest office, he failed to win the goal of Chinese life, seeing one after another of his companions preferred to honourable posts whilst he remained obscure at home.

This oriental Goldsmith revelled in the world of letters. Nor was there anything he touched

within it that he did not adorn—his divine gift, infallible, absolute, but ungoverned by judgment, achieving little more than a piquant reputation for one whose life exhibited the wisdom and the follies of 'an inspired idiot.'

IV. 'LOVE STRONGER THAN DEATH'

> There is no passion in the mind of man
> So weak, but it mates and masters the fear of death.'

THE Island of the Golden Gate is one of the seaward barriers of Chinchew. On summer afternoons its ruddy beach rests on the sun-touched water like the scalloped rim of a copper vessel upon a cloth of purple shot with gold. But on most days of the year the island is threshed by monsoon wind and torn by volleying breakers. When the world is in a stormy mood, its black peaks stand up bitterly between the heaving ocean and the heavy skies; one low hill, gashed by a landslip, showing white above the foam. In more changeful weather, the mountains, partly lost to view beneath soft clouds, show haunting violets and greys among their shadows, and now and then a break in the sky-drift makes morning for a moment, where the light falls upon some red-roofed human habitation amidst the green of cultivated fields.

In the valleys between the mountains of the island, and in sheltered places by the shore, lie villages inhabited by fishers. When not employed at sea, these folk give up a portion of their time to farming crofts in sheltered hollows, or now and then to trading with the people of Amoy; whilst feuds and piracy fill the remainder of the year. Life lived in such surroundings is difficult. The powers of nature fray the islanders and possess their minds. Their eyes are filled by changing waters, and the wind buffets them body and soul. Cut off from their fellows by a treacherous channel, obscurity hangs over their doings, of which little is known by people on the mainland, save when some clan difference or deed of blood drives them to seek the magistrates on shore.

Several hundred years ago, before the last native dynasty had passed away, two lovers lived in a village on the island. The girl had been betrothed when but a child to the son of a prosperous family in a village situated at some considerable distance from her father's home. The lad, a growing youth, dwelt in a house near by. According to Chinese custom, the two were dead to one another, so far as marriage was concerned, for a girl betrothed in China is bound as closely as a wedded woman.

But love, forbidden by the law, came all unbidden into these young lives. The relentless usage of their people rendered such love mere madness, for, though the law is weak among these sea-bred folk, custom is strong, and the vendetta [1] follows quick on despite done to family ties.

At the moment when the old-world story opens, the lovers' secret was still unknown. They dreamt of joy together in their pitiful paradise, and put away the thought of losing it. To hearts unschooled like theirs, love was a great discovery—a happy land reserved for them alone in all the world—a shore unvisited by human foot before. It was a childish ignorance, yet most natural in a country where the romance of Western life is scarcely known, and men and women who have never seen each other come together at the bidding of their parents.

In the mean time, an auspicious day had been chosen for the appointed marriage, and preparations had begun. The girl went secretly and told her lover. Possessed by grief and terror, she passed the hours in weeping. In vain she pleaded for some delay: her parents turned deaf ears to all entreaties. It was

[1] "In China, especially in the south, the vendetta is no less obligatory than in Arabia or in mediaeval Italy."—*Cycle of Cathay*, p. 112.

unseemly that a maiden should presume, even where her chief interests were engaged, to discuss matters already settled by her elders. Her only duty was to hearken and obey.

Watching her opportunity, the bride-elect crept forth to meet her lover on the day before that chosen for the wedding. The end was very near, but love is sweet close under the shadow of death. Another day, or perhaps two, and all that they held dear would cease. Only by an expedient of the most desperate kind was it possible for them to meet again, but they were desperate, and love like theirs flings prudence to the winds. So they resolved to make the venture, and laid their plans to meet again upon the morrow.

Early next day the bride was dressed in her embroidered robe of crimson, in spite of tears and wild remonstrances—what more fitting in a Chinese bride than floods of tears? Her family, though somewhat moved perhaps, were greatly comforted by this seemly behaviour on the part of a daughter of the house. Even the neighbours felt that maiden fear and filial regret found adequate expression in such dolorous reluctance to leave the ancestral home. As soon as all was ready, the customary black veil was put upon her face; and

when she had taken her place in the wedding sedan chair of carved wood, painted red and gilded, the doors of it were closed and sealed with strips of paper bearing the usual inscriptions. Then the bridal canopy was placed upon the roof of the chair, and she was borne to her new home, accompanied by a retinue of attendants carrying baskets, furniture and boxes, all of red.

When the procession reached its destination, the chair was put down in the front court of the house, just inside the gates. At the same moment the bridegroom, dressed in robes of silk, long boots, and ceremonial hat, was brought forward by his friends. On reaching the front of the chair, according to the usual etiquette he turned his back, and stepping between the carrying poles, kicked the door open, breaking the paper seals, and immediately withdrew. Two old women then received the bride with whispered encouragements, patting her shoulders and stroking her with their hands. Music was played by a band of hired musicians, and after all the due preliminaries, the young people knelt down to worship Heaven and Earth, and offered their devotions before the ancestral tablets of the bridegroom's family.

After the wedding ceremony, there was tea-

drinking within the chamber, where the bride, supported by her mother-in-law, served tea to the guests, each of whom left the accustomed piece of money in his cup. Whilst everyone was thus engaged, the girl's lover slipped in unnoticed among the crowd of guests and concealed himself within the room. A little later, tables of red lacquer were set in the family hall and a feast was spread, the festivities being continued until late. Thus it was nearly midnight when the bride and bridegroom were conducted to their bedroom, and the guests departed. The swinging lanterns, red and yellow, and the remnants of the massive candles were extinguished, and silence fell upon the house.

No sooner was the door of the bedroom shut upon the crowd of smiling friends and relatives than the bride quietly bolted it. Her lover then emerged from his hiding-place, and with the girl's help gagged the astonished bridegroom, and forcing him into a crouching attitude, bound him to the foot of the bed. When they had made all fast, and tied his queue in such a manner that he could not move his head a hairsbreadth without excruciating pain, the pair kept watch in turns, guarding their prisoner with a knife lest he should struggle to get

free. Had it been possible, they would have forced the window and escaped under cover of the darkness, leaving their captive to his friends. But they had no chance of evading the sleepless vigilance of the close-built village round them. And even had they passed beyond its limits by some lucky chance, there were hamlets everywhere, and beyond these the pitiless sea, ringing them in on every side. Besides, they did not think of life so much as of a love which made them willing to die, if only together.

Next morning the relatives came to the door of the room and found it shut. Later in the day they knocked again, but were refused admittance. The desperate pair, explaining through the closed door how matters stood within, demanded rice for themselves and for their prisoner. They added that they would dispatch him should food be refused them, or in case of an attempt to force the door. The family, terrified by what had happened, and fearing lest the only son of the house might suffer, provided food.

For two days the siege continued. On the second night, however, the bridegroom's father, determined to save his son if possible, engaged a skilled housebreaker to force an entrance into the

room and effect a rescue. About midnight the thief climbed the single-storeyed house and quietly made his way from point to point, until he found himself upon the roof above the bridal chamber. Choosing a spot suitable for his operations, he prized off the lime and gently moved the tiles aside, until there was a chink big enough for him to watch what was going on in the ceilingless room below. Seeing that all was quiet, he gradually enlarged the opening, working with stealthy caution so as to make as little sound as possible. He wrought so deftly that only now and then was there a faint grating noise, such as rats make when they creep along the rafters and stir the tiles. At intervals the cunning fingers, busy as death, plied their task swiftly, at intervals paused in their work and waited. The breathless summer night favoured the thief, for the air being warm and still, no draught fell through the aperture to set the lamp flame flickering by the wall. The rats seemed to be active that night, but the inmates of the room beneath scarcely noticed the accustomed sound.

At last the hole was large enough for a man's body to pass through. The thief uncoiled a light rope from his waist, and laying it on the roof beside

him, bided his time. It was the woman's turn to watch. Worn by fear and strong emotion, she nodded drowsily at her post. Then sleep overpowered her, and the knife fell from her hands. The lad lay motionless upon the bed. The thief leant his body through the hole and tied his rope securely to one of the pine rafters. Then he drew back again and waited, lest his movements might have disturbed the sleepers. Peeping cautiously once more, he saw that all was quiet in the chamber, and that the girl had sunk in heavy slumber to the ground.

The man now slipped through the opening and came down the rope, landing on the floor of the room with the silence and adroitness of a Chinese burglar. Immediately he cut the bridegroom's bonds and, opening the door, threw himself upon the lad on the bed. The relatives rushed in and seized the bride. The capture was complete; there was a faint scuffle and a cry or two, then all was over.

Sown with salt by the sea wind, and barren of human interest, the scene of this story lies amidst its tangled shoals as it lay centuries ago when these unschooled lives were lived in it. Obscurity hangs dark above their memory, as

when the storm rack veils the Island of the Golden Gate and the mountains disappear in shadow, but where the light breaks through, their human love in tenderness and terror flames for a moment on the edge of doom.

V. BASE METAL

MANY years ago, in Chinchew city, a lad whom we may call Tan lived with his widowed mother, in the one wretched room which served them for a home. When old enough he took service as 'boy' in a cash-shop, so as to do his share in providing food for the 'two mouths' of the family.

Tan's master kept him busy running errands, cooking rice, working sums upon the abacus, and sorting out money, good and bad, for those who came to change their silver at the counter. But, while thus employed among strings of copper cash, the lad snatched precious moments in which to practise writing on such stray scraps of paper as he could find. In the dim twilight of the dusky shop or under its smoky lamp, he would sit plying his brush till called away, and soon showed such skill in the all-important art of forming letters, that his master, with the interest in literary effort so

characteristic of the people, encouraged him to persevere.

The lad made rapid progress; from the practice of handwriting he went on to composition, evincing considerable ability in building such essays as are required from the literary candidates at the examinations.

One of the neighbours, a scholar named Nng, noticing the promise shown by the young student, spoke to the lad's mother, saying, "Your son is cut out for a man of letters; you should not leave him longer at his present occupation."

"But the child must help to earn his living," said the woman; "a widowed house cannot support a student."

"Don't worry about that, my friend," continued Mr. Nng; "if your son will come to me, I can train him myself, and his studies will cost you nothing. He may repay me by and by, if he wishes to do so, when his efforts have been crowned with success."

Young Tan profited so much under his benefactor's teaching, that, when only twenty years of age, he took the bachelor's degree, graduating as Master of Arts some two years later. Such were the boy's gifts and such his industry that no test seemed too great for his powers, and he reached at length the

highest goal of scholarship, entering the 'Forest of Pencils' and becoming member of the Imperial Academy of Letters.

The boy who had toiled early and late for so many years in Chinchew, developed into a remarkable personality ; big-boned and of imposing presence, his strong face marked with heavy eyebrows and his authoritative voice claiming respect from all. A sound scholar, he was also prompt in action, showing capacity in business matters and a remarkable aptness for the diplomacies of yamen life.

After occupying several minor posts under the Government, the widow's son was appointed to the important office of Intendant of Circuit at Seleng, in the province of Kansuh. Among other matters calling for immediate attention at Seleng, he found that several complaints against Buddhist monks had been left unsettled by his predecessor. The monks in question lived within his circuit, at a place called Pek-hoa-si, or White Flower Monastery. Most of the undetermined charges laid at their door were for abducting women and bestowing them no one knew where: in connexion with more than one of these suits the monastery had been searched and every possible source of evidence ransacked, but without result. No proofs sufficiently incriminating

had been discovered, and although the monks were known to have the women hidden away, they had managed to elude detection. Mr. Tan's interest was attracted by these cases, and he determined to settle them if possible. Rumour had it that the monks were very wealthy, and as crafty as they were rich. Here then was an enterprise worthy of all his efforts; where others had failed, he would succeed. Thus, urged on by duty and self-interest alike, he laid his plans with care.

When the Intendant's scheme was perfected, he chose a fitting time, and, having arranged for the discharge of business during his absence, proceeded to the monastery. It was necessary to act promptly, for the plan in part depended on his person being unknown to the monks.

A journey of some days brought the traveller to his destination. It was a lovely spot upon a wooded hill, where the shrines were buried amidst the cool green foliage of trees. The soft summer wind breathed in their shaded courts, whilst a tumbling stream echoed among the rocks below. Here and there in chosen places were summer-houses, where visitors from busy cities rested themselves in dreamy ease, and others, more earnest than their fellows, in dreamier contemplation; whilst ever and

SACRED FISH POND IN A BUDDHIST MONASTERY.

again the sound of an unseen bell, chiming far within the recesses of the mountain, floated past.

Having taken up his quarters at the monastery, the Intendant made a friend of the Abbot, who was head and brain of the community. He cultivated the society of the monks, passing the sunny hours with them among the shaded courts and shy pavilions of the holy place. He lingered on the paved terraces among camellias and citron trees, spending many an hour chatting over thin-stemmed water-pipes, garlanded with white jasmine flowers, or drinking tea more delicately fragrant than the odorous blossoms in the gardens; he visited the pampered pigs and fowls, the buffaloes and querulous camels, kept in sacred ease at the monastery stables by merit-seeking devotees; he watched the lazy carp splash for biscuits in their guarded pool; he worshipped night and morning in the dim centre temple, where the gilded images sit with dreamy faces amidst the shadows.

Thus time passed in an amiable, careless way, as though the claims of office were all forgotten, and the monks came to regard the familiar presence as one of themselves. On a certain morning, Mr. Tan noticed one of the monks open a secret

door behind the shrine of Kwan-yin, the goddess of Mercy, and disappear. Next day he left the mountain for the city; he had got what he wanted. The key to the mystery of the White Flower Monastery lay in his hands.

Soon after his return to headquarters Mr. Tan summoned the chief people of the district, and taking them into his confidence, explained how he had determined to bring the famous monks to a reckoning. The people's help, however, was indispensable for carrying out the project which he had formed. The villagers must give their aid under the bond of secrecy; not a word must be said which could alarm the priests and put them on their guard. It would be best to take the monks at unawares, and by craft if possible, rather than by force: since they were skilled in blowing deadly iron arrows from their mouths and so numerous that to attack them openly among the mountains might lead to serious loss of life.

The village headmen, anxious to be free from the malpractices of such formidable neighbours, joyfully consented to do their part in carrying out the scheme. Forthwith the work was put in hand. On a given day the villagers, acting on instructions

from their chiefs, sent to the monastery from all the surrounding country for priests to perform thanksgiving ceremonies, or the usual rites for warding off calamity. Thus it was brought about that the monks were scattered in twos and threes. Secret orders had already been given to the families with whom the priests were lodged; and during the night following the ceremonies for which they had been summoned, they were put to death.

Early in the morning, after the night fixed on for the priest-killing, the Intendant, having borrowed two hundred soldiers from the military authorities of the district, surrounded the monastery. As he approached the place, the Abbot, attended only by two young priests, came out to welcome him, but filled with suspicion at the strength of the escort accompanying his friend, he fled. The monks, less wary than their master, were seized by the Intendant and compelled to show where the valuables of the temple were concealed. This they did, pointing out its various stores of goods. On passing through the hidden door behind the idol of Kwan-yin, Mr. Tan discovered a passage leading to a rift in the hills, the sides of which were formed by towering cliffs and

precipices. At the bottom of this little ravine lay a level bit of ground, occupied by buildings, from which over thirty women were recovered. At length, choosing a moment when the soldiers were scattered through the grounds and buildings of the establishment, the monks asked their captor to dismiss his personal attendant for a moment, as they had something of importance for his eye alone. On his complying with their request, they led him into a secret chamber filled with the ill-gotten treasures of the monks, where the once destitute boy was dazzled by the sight of silver beyond counting, not to speak of three images of the goddess of Mercy with their attendant Lo-han idols, all of gold. The precious metal had been carefully painted over to conceal it from uninitiated eyes, so that, but for his informants, Mr. Tan would have failed to recognise the full value of his find.

The greatness of the discovery staggered the explorer. Here was wealth beyond his utmost hopes. A sudden mad desire seized him, his clear mind grasping in a moment what this treasure trove might mean for one who should have nerve enough to venture all for its possession. Learning, office, fame, what were these in com-

parison with immediate enrichment! In a flash the choice was made.

Ruthless measures were taken lest the monks should speak to others of the painted gold. His Excellency, as in duty bound, had the silver packed up and forwarded to the Emperor; but he kept the images, saying, "I will worship these myself."

When the idols had been conveyed to his own quarters in the city, the adroit functionary employed two goldsmiths, whom he had bribed to secrecy, to cut them up into thin slips. These slips were placed between the pages of books, of which he purchased large stores, as officials often do when returning from office to their native cities. The gold having been prepared for transit in this fashion, the unfortunate workmen were made away with, lest they should betray the nature of their labours.

The Intendant's chief difficulty, however, was to secure the silence of the leader of the soldiers, a certain Tin-tai. To him therefore he gave an archer's thumb-ring of precious jade, possessing the virtue of colouring fluids green to such an extent, that if he dipped it in a large tub of water, the whole would be tinctured by it. But

fearing that the Tin-tai might betray him, notwithstanding the bribe, the guilty man afterwards accused him of appropriating this ring, and had him beheaded by order of the Emperor.

Having thus succeeded beyond all his expectations, Mr. Tan asked for sick leave, praying the permission of the Dragon Throne to return to his native city, where he might be cared for at his own home by physicians acquainted with his malady. The silver which had been forwarded to the palace having smoothed the way, he obtained the leave asked for, and went off carrying his precious books with him. What more natural than that an official whose career had been founded in love of letters should devote part of his well-earned gains to the acquisition of a library? Tradition, it is true, conspired with public opinion against a mandarin's returning from his post with trains of baggage borne behind his silken chair. The mere appearance of having multiplied possessions, whilst acting as 'father and mother of the people' under the Son of Heaven, was to be avoided. No one would venture to complain of books, however, whilst quantities of any other luggage would have raised suspicion in every town and village through which his retinue might chance to pass.

Thus at one throw the fortunes of the Tan family, if fortunes they may be called, were founded.

His Excellency did not resume his northern Intendantship. The climate of the south suited him better. The monks, several of whom had escaped the ruin of their community, were burning for revenge, and they were not men to be trifled with. No one knew this better than Mr. Tan. The practised administrator was, however, a match for his enemies. A man less gifted had been lost, for only a nature joining snake-like subtlety to the clear eye and relentless spring of the tiger could have escaped. The priests, for their part, knew the powers of the man with whom they had to deal, and, much as they longed to punish their enemy, they feared to place themselves within reach of his claws.

Reports continued to be spread in the north as to the Intendant's precarious health. A wasting illness was said to have fastened upon him; his strength was failing; his mind was sick; soon death would end his sufferings. It was impossible for one so shattered ever to resume the cares of office. Mr. Tan was never to be seen in the streets of Chinchew. Indisposition confined him to his chamber.

The monks, who had a subterranean news agency of their own, learned, as was intended, of this prolonged confinement. It was true then, the outraged idols had avenged themselves, smiting the sacrilegious robber with lingering death.

Time passed, but his Excellency kept close, like a Chinese tiger crouching in its cave. He had scanned the book of life too well not to foresee some further action on the part of the monks. He was right. The Abbot, almost as wily as himself, resolved to visit Chinchew, in order to verify the rumours that had reached him at the White Flower Monastery! The visitor, whose arrival at the Tan mansion was not unexpected, was received there with a simple courtesy. On inquiring for the great man, he was told that his Excellency was very ill. The fourth son of the family entertained the honoured guest with due formality, but without any marked attention. The holy man's name was unknown to him, but that was not surprising, his venerated father had so many friends in distant parts. Had his Excellency been able, he would no doubt have gladly welcomed one who had come so far to see him. The whole family would certainly have joined in detaining his reverence had there been any reasonable hope of their venerable

chief's speedy recovery, but that, unfortunately, was not to be expected.

Ah! thought the Abbot, the Intendant is really ill; the home-going was not a ruse; we may leave him to the vengeance of the gods.

Young Mr. Tan dismissed the visitor, after providing him with a sum of money sufficient for his homeward journey. Thus a dangerous interview was avoided, and the matter of the images was at rest; for the monks, who knew that by their ill-gotten wealth they had incurred the odium of rulers and people alike, did not dare publish their loss by openly seeking their stolen treasure. The Abbot, seeing that further efforts would be useless, left the city and returned no more to Chinchew.

But wrongful gains did not bring lasting wealth. In course of time the great man died in the handsome red brick house adorned with beautiful rockery gardens which he had built for himself within the city. The tablet marking his rank as an academician remains above the doorway, over whose threshold he will never pass again. His family has dwindled, the gardens and summer-houses which he constructed are in ruins, and the gold for which a glorious scholar, forgetting

honour and pity, sold the outcome of so many patient years, and a promising official vilely cast away his seal, is lost, with all the other idols of the man's undoing; but the account is still to pay.

VI THE BRONZE ANTIQUE

THE house of Tsng Han-lim, the famous scholar and virtuoso, was full of books, bronzes, and precious porcelains, its chief treasures being collected in the 'book room,' a small but well-furnished chamber with a suite of several apartments opening out of it. Here, among calligraphic scrolls and rubbings of inscriptions, hung the picture of a phoenix, which, viewed from a distance, showed the 'empress bird' in graceful outline, but looked at nearer, changed into a mass of ruddy feathers, and on still closer inspection resolved itself into a whirling red mist. The porcelain hat-stand, and other ornaments upon the dais at the upper end of the room, were of fine Kiangsi 'five colour' ware, and on a carved stand at one side stood a 'sang-de-bœuf' vase, the highly glazed enamel of which reflected the objects in the room. Opening off the study was the library, and in the room beyond it again a collection of ancient Chinese coins. The quest for

such objects had occupied Mr. Tsng for years, increasing until it had become a passion which led him into serious extravagances, interfering sometimes also with his discharge of public business. Indeed, it was supposed that where all other gifts had failed to influence him, a well-timed present of a piece of 'Fukien white' or an incense burner of genuine 'Ming' bronze was almost certain to produce the desired effect.

The academician's mania for collecting was so well known, that dealers pursued him even upon his travels. On a certain occasion, when the duties of Literary Chancellor had carried him into the province of Honan, word was brought by one of these men, that some individual in the vicinity had come into possession of an ancient bronze vessel of considerable value.

Mr. Tsng caused inquiries to be made as to the whereabouts of this treasure, but for a time without success. The dealer, however, undertook to find the bronze and have it brought to the neighbouring prefectural city, where the Chancellor was shortly due. After some days, this man wrote stating that he had discovered the object of his search, which proved to be a tripod, worn by age and exposure to sea-water, but with an almost legible inscription in

curious 'tadpole' characters upon it. The metal of which it was composed was thin and light, but unbroken. Its owner, however, refused to allow it out of his own keeping, and being much occupied with affairs, declined to bring it to the city where his Excellency then was. In fact, it was doubtful whether he would sell it for any price, as he seemed convinced that the tripod was historical; since the ancient books referred to a vessel of the same description which had been thrown into the sea not far from the place where the bronze in question was actually discovered.

This message raised the Chancellor's expectations to white heat, and he sent off a messenger instructing the dealer to spare no expense, but to bring the tripod and its owner with all dispatch into the city. Still the man lingered, and it was only after a considerable delay that a second letter arrived, explaining that the possessor of the bronze was not inclined to part with it. Fresh inquiries from the Chancellor brought the reply that the man would sell if he got his own price, but that he would not accept a smaller sum than twelve thousand taels of silver. This was a crushing blow, for such a price was staggering even to a Literary Chancellor, into whose pockets money flowed

like water. His Excellency, however, was fairly in the toils; the collector's lust had seized him, and though wincing at the price demanded, he ordered his agent to have the bronze brought into the city before the close of the examinations should render it necessary for him to leave the prefecture.

After some more procrastination the dealer at last appeared bringing the precious tripod and its owner with him. The man, who was conveyed into his Excellency's presence within an hour of his arrival, answered the questions put to him in a simple and apparently straightforward manner. He had found the tripod while fishing in the bay near his own home. It had got entangled in his nets, and had been dragged with difficulty from the mud at the bottom of the water. Noticing that it was very thin and light, and that the lettering upon the surface was ancient, he had shown it to people skilled in such things, and had learned that possibly the tripod might be as ancient as the times of Yu the Great himself. Despite the improbability of this last suggestion, the Chancellor was impressed by the man's story, and his eyes gleamed with excitement as he looked at the ancient vessel. Then, fearing lest his eagerness might betray itself further, he dismissed the man, saying that when he had the

leisure to do so, he himself would carefully examine the tripod.

No sooner was the owner gone, however, than his Excellency sent for such catalogues and encyclopædias giving descriptions of old bronzes, as were procurable within the city, and spent the evening studying them, in the hope that he might discover something about the date and value of the vessel. As he was turning over one of these books, he came upon a woodcut so closely resembling the tripod that it arrested his attention. Beneath the woodcut was a description which gave detailed measurements and an account of the tadpole characters engraved upon the surface of the bronze described. Dumb with eagerness, he conned the page, comparing the vessel and the picture. The more he studied them, the more exact did the resemblance between the two appear to be. The measurements corresponded; the inscription, allowing for long exposure and erosion, was the same. The metal was strangely thin, however, giving only a dull wooden sound when struck; but that was said to be a mark of very ancient bronze. The weight was considerably less than that mentioned in the book, but this fact, as well as the thinness of the material, might easily be accounted for by the vicissitudes of centuries.

Calling one of his secretaries, a relative of his own whom he could trust, the Chancellor told him of his discovery, and made him test each detail of the resemblances so that there might be no mistake. The secretary was soon almost as enthusiastic as his chief, and the two began encouraging each other in the belief that one of the long-lost treasures of ancient China stood before them.

Next morning negotiations for the purchase of the bronze were begun, and after several days of cheapening and strife, the Chancellor secured the coveted antique for six thousand taels. When the bargain was completed, the chief officials of the city and the leading members of his retinue were invited to 'drink wine' in honour of the occasion. A feast was spread, and when the guests had 'eaten to the full,' they were conducted to a room where, upon a large table, the newly acquired tripod was placed, with the book containing the description lying open beside it. The measurements, weight, and inscription were pointed out to the guests, who hailed each new coincidence with pleasure, draining the cups of wine handed to them in celebration of such indubitable evidence that they were privileged to see a famous relic of bygone ages. The lettering of the difficult inscription was studied long and

carefully, in its turn confirming the opinion that the ancient vase was genuine. More wine was called for and drunk amid a chorus of congratulations. "Ah," said one of the scholars, whose eye had fallen on the book upon the table, "there remains a test which has not yet been applied to his Excellency's tripod."

"What is that?" queried another of the company.

"We have not proved how much the tripod will hold," answered the scholar. "See, in this description of it the internal capacity of the vessel is given."

"Our friend is right," cried the Chancellor. "Ho there! Let the proper amount of water be brought and carefully measured into the tripod."

In obedience to the summons a servant fetched some water and poured the required quantity into the bronze. It filled the tripod to the brim. Shouts of acclamation greeted this fresh proof of genuineness. More jars of wine were called for. The guests with new congratulations surrounded the table, and raised their beakers again to celebrate their host's good fortune, when — 'pee-uk'; a slight cracking sound was heard, and streams of water burst from the tripod, flooding the table and pouring upon the floor. The famous bronze had broken, and was melting into pulp before the eyes of the

astonished revellers. When the Chancellor and his friends had shaken off their stupefied surprise they discovered that the tripod was a counterfeit of papier-mâché, treated cunningly with clay and verdigris and covered with brown varnish so as to resemble ancient bronze. It was an exquisite imitation, the chef d'œuvre of a master craftsman, a manipulation scarcely possible outside of China, where, if anywhere, the last word of finished guile in human handiwork has been spoken.

ROCKS NEAR AMOY.

VII. THE TAO-TAI'S SEAL

AT the end of an alley, with its back against a huge boulder, stood a house over the front court of which a neighbouring banyan spread its shadowing shroud. Silence reigned outside the dwelling, for even when their traffic was at its height, the clamour of the streets did not reach this quiet corner, and at the time of which this story tells, the town was already hushed for the night. Inside the house, however, there were lights and the stir of voices. Paper lanterns, covered with dim red lettering, hung in the dining-room, casting a subdued radiance upon a group of men who were feasting at a square table, while people were coming and going in the other apartments.

Basins containing soups, fish, chicken, and other delicacies, came in succession from the kitchen hard by, and were placed before the guests; and on the arrival of each dish their cups were filled afresh with wine.

The house was a poor one, its furniture consisting of benches, tables and shaky wooden bedsteads, all of the meanest description. The clothing of the inmates appeared to be in keeping with these surroundings, though an observant eye might have detected signs of prosperity here and there, such as a silver-mounted tobacco pipe leaning against the wall, or the edge of a quilted silken jacket, or a fringe of lamb's fleece lining peeping from beneath a cotton garment. The viands which came smoking from the kitchen, together with the quality of the liquor upon the table, also showed that the inmates of the dwelling were not reduced to the last shifts of poverty.

The feasters were, in fact, a company of thieves, assembled to do honour to one of their profession, a Mr. Lo, who had lately come to the vicinity.

When the guests had satisfied their hunger, conversation began to take the place of that steady feeding, which silences the first stages of a Chinese feast.

The stranger was now subjected to a series of courteous inquiries, by which he was led to speak of his professional experiences. He told how, like others of their craft, he had learned in boyhood to run up a ten-foot wall by means of a rope and stone

thrown over the top; and how he had captured chickens by blowing grains of rice so that, when a bird advanced to peck them, the V of the opened fore and middle fingers swept rapidly beneath the beak, and carried her under his jacket, where a twist and squeeze finished the business. He described also how he had graduated in 'mouse-thieving,' or the lighter branch of the art, stealing the mat from beneath a man in bed without wakening him, by gently tickling his ear with a feather and giving the mat a slight pull each time the victim moved away in his sleep to escape from the annoyance.

As the wine circulated, the thieves talked more freely, each recounting his experiences with gusto; but the guest of the evening outdid his hosts, telling among other things how he had broken into a temple, and, unnoticed by the priests who slept within, had built a scaffolding of altar tables, and completely scraped the gilding from an image of the god of war during the night.

In spite of their polite speeches, the local men were nettled by Mr. Lo's stories, and one of their number, whose tongue was loosened by the wine which he had drunk, challenged the new-comer to give some proof of his vaunted powers. When the man asked what evidence would suffice him, several

trials of skill were suggested, but without approving themselves to the company. At last, however, one of the thieves, a wizened old fellow with an eye like the slit in a money-box, broke silence:

"If the master craftsman desires to show us a specimen of his handiwork, let him steal the Tao-tai's seal from the great yamen."

This proposal was hailed with acclamation by the revellers, who now turned inquiring glances towards their guest, awaiting his response. The new-comer, though staggered as well by the difficulty of the task suggested, as by the serious consequences which its accomplishment would involve, felt that his reputation was concerned, and accepted the challenge. Once more the wine cups were emptied, and, wishing their visitor good speed upon his enterprise, the guests departed.

Mr. Lo set about his work in leisurely fashion, reconnoitring the ground with a skill which proved him to be no ordinary workman.

Providing himself with the outfit of an itinerant barber, he hung about the streets and came and went within the yamen itself, picking up scraps of information from his customers as they sat beneath his razor. In this way he gained a fair idea of the place, and when called to shave the children in the

women's quarters of the Tao-tai's home behind the offices, he was able to complete his survey.

In the course of inquiries the thief discovered that the Tao-tai's seal, carrying with it the powers of office as it did, was strictly guarded. It would be impossible to snatch it from the custody of its keepers in the daytime, and every night it was carried to the magnate's bedroom, where it was placed in the 'box pillow,' on which he laid his head when he retired to rest. The only chance of gaining possession of the seal, in fact, was to enter the private dwelling, and steal it from beneath his Excellency in his own bedroom. But to reach the house behind the other buildings was no easy matter; for the yamen, tenanted by an army of runners, attendants, and officials, lay between it and the entrance gateway. A wall of considerable height, too much exposed to be dug through with safety, surrounded the entire block of buildings, whilst his Excellency's residential quarters were cut off from the rest of the yamen by strong doors, which were locked at night. To make the great enclosure doubly safe, the outer wall was topped by thin tiles, placed upon their edges and cemented in pairs so as to look like rows of the letter V inverted, a horizontal layer of tiles being placed upon

the topmost row of all. In this way the compound was protected by a flimsy, card-like structure, ready to fall with a crash should a rope or ladder be employed to scale the wall.

So difficult was the place to enter, indeed, that the thief had almost repented of his undertaking; but it happened that, whilst walking disconsolately at the back of the yamen, he noticed a banyan growing within the enclosure, which sent a large branch over the wall, looping down low enough into the road to be reached by a vigorous jump. A glance sufficed to show him that here was a way out of his difficulties, a bridge by which the obstacles in his path might be got over. Fortune indeed had favoured him, for the Tao-tai's house lay just inside that portion of the compound where the tree was growing.

Having thus discovered a point at which an entrance might be made into the yamen, he saw his way more clearly. A plan of action, simple enough in its conception but calling for both skill and daring, shaped itself in his mind, and he set about effecting it forthwith. In order to carry out his idea, the first step was to look for an empty out-house, or corner among ruined walls, such as may be often met with in Chinese towns, where his final

arrangements might be made close enough to the scene of operations. A short search sufficed to discover a neglected shrine suitable for his purpose, standing in a bit of empty ground not far from the Tao-tai's house. Here, amid a pile of decaying ancestral tablets, he concealed an earthenware bottle, two or three tiny pots of pigment, a bit of rope, and some other things necessary for his attempt upon the yamen.

About twelve o'clock on a windy, moonless night, Mr. Lo went to the shrine to make ready. Divesting himself of all clothing but a short pair of cotton trousers, which he rolled as far up the thigh as possible, he oiled the exposed parts of his body, so as to slip easily from the hands of those who might try to grapple with him. His queue he knotted in a bunch and filled with needles, so that no one could seize him by the hair. The next step was to paint his face black and white, in ghastly likeness to the popular representations of evil spirits, and to place a double-pointed knife between his teeth, so as to be able to stab by turning his head and shoulders, whilst keeping his hands free for action, should he be set upon by the Tao-tai's servants. A light rope, with large knots at intervals of about a yard, and one or two housebreaking tools, completed his outfit.

Quietly making his way to the deserted street behind the yamen, the thief got below the overhanging bough where it dipped lowest over the wall, and, after several failures, managed to spring high enough to clutch it with his hands. Then he drew himself up, and, clinging to the rough bark, slowly worked his way until he reached the trunk of the tree. After resting there for a short time, he wormed himself along another limb, from which at length he clambered down, by means of the knotted rope, landing gently upon the roof of the Tao-tai's quarters. Crossing the tiles, he reached a flat space used as a roof garden, from which a door opened upon one of the passages within the building. Here he paused and listened to hear whether anyone was stirring. All was quiet, however, but for the rushing of the wind in the branches and the rattle of woodwork about the house.

To make an entrance from the terrace was an easy matter for so experienced a workman: the door yielded at the first attempt, and the thief was inside the Tao-tai's lodgings.

Guided by information which he had obtained beforehand, the man crept from passage to passage, until he found himself outside his Excellency's bedroom. Peeping through a hole in one of the

paper-covered windows of the partition, he saw that the chamber was illuminated by a lamp burning upon a table close to the wall. Without pausing longer than was necessary to offer a brief petition to his patron god the tiger, he entered the room, and, going straight to the bedside, drew apart the curtains and struck the magnate a sharp blow upon the chest. The Tao-tai opened his dazed eyes, when, seeing the unearthly figure standing over him, he made sure his end had come, and fell into an agony of terror. The thief, keeping his diabolical visage fixed upon his victim, calmly stretched out his left hand and drew the pillow box, containing the precious golden seal, from beneath the 'great man's' head; at the same time blowing out the lamp, he disappeared into the darkness.

The Tao-tai, bemused with sleep and sure that no mortal dared lay hands upon him in such fashion, had little doubt as to the unearthly nature of the visitation. Superstition mingled with his drowsy fancies, convincing him that he was under ghostly summons from the nether world to give account of his administration; and he swooned away, failing to recover consciousness until long after the robber was beyond pursuit.

Thus the thief maintained his reputation, but the

great official was ruined. The successful cracksman, too wily to stake his safety upon the loyalty of his fellow-craftsmen at the house beneath the boulder, left the town forthwith, and it was only indirectly that its instigators learned how the amazing burglary had been performed.

The Tao-tai spent a fortune in trying to recover the seal; but it was never seen again. Search was made in all the pawnshops of the district, special agents were everywhere employed in efforts to discover traces of the thief, proclamations offering large rewards for information as to the missing treasure were published far and wide, but all in vain. His Excellency was a broken man, and finally surrendered himself to undergo the severest penalties for carelessness in his custody of the high powers represented by the seal, and his consequent failure to keep the charge intrusted to him by the Emperor.

VIII. THE QUALITY OF MERCY—STRAINED

LATE one afternoon, the fall of flying feet, accompanied by panting as of lungs nigh bursting, echoed loudly in a narrow passage behind the 'worship hall' at Ho-Chhi, and these sounds had scarcely passed away when the scampering rush of a crowd in full pursuit poured clamorously through the lane. At this point a visitor, who had just reached the place, eager to know what was happening, left the church, and passing beneath a banyan tree outside the building came upon a number of men and boys. In the thick of the crowd he found two stalwart fellows grappling with a man of about five-and-forty on the brink of a cistern which was filled to the brim with liquid manure. The prisoner, who was resisting desperately, had his right hand forced between the back of his head and one of his captor's fists, in a frantic endeavour to prevent his hair from being

pulled out by the roots. In spite of his struggles, however, the wrestlers, one of whom was dragging him by the queue, whilst the other pushed him by the waist, were slowly edging him towards the pit. The work was done methodically: there was a grip and a tussle; the wretch had lost another inch. The men rested for a moment, holding him firmly the while; then came a fresh effort, and again the remaining space was perceptibly shortened. The victim's face had a set, almost indifferent expression, but his bare feet were eloquent of resistance, the toes striking into the red earth and scratching the surface where they slipped. He was already within a yard of the hole; a few more minutes and he would have been choking in its fetid depths.

"What are you doing?" said the stranger, as he went up to the group.

"The man's a thief; we are going to drown him," said the fellow who held him by the waist, as he looked up over his shoulder.

"What right have you to kill the man, brothers? Is not this a land possessed of courts of law and magistrates, before whom you may accuse him?"

"The magistrates are no good," growled a bystander.

"To assume the power of life and death is an offence against the guardians of the law."

"The mandarins care for nothing but how to fill their pockets; the people must protect themselves."

"The man is an incorrigible thief," said another voice.

"That is no reason why you should break the law."

"An evil son," cried someone else.

The crowd, having by this time recovered from the sudden inroad which had interrupted its proceedings, now began to surge and clamour. It scarce allowed itself to be heard. But voices louder than the rest came stabbing through the chorus.

"Robber."

"Villain."

"Scoundrel."

"Not to be borne with longer."

"The village is of one mind to punish him."

"Dead dog."

"But the teaching of the ancient kings speaks of benevolence as well as justice. To drown the man would neither be benevolent nor just. Not to give him another chance would scarce be merciful. To punish him untried would be just neither to him nor to your country's laws."

Another burst of exclamations came from the onlookers.

"Unfilial son."

"Wandering rascal of the streets."

"Drown him, villain!"

"Drown the thief."

Upon this the executioners gave the man another heave.

"Hold, brothers; what has he done?"

"He has stolen taro root."

"Brothers, forgive him; we all are sinners."

The tumult lessened.

"Stay a moment. If you kill him, you will do it with a bad conscience, and bring trouble on yourselves, perhaps clan fighting, more murders, lawsuits, and a heavy fine."

"He ought to die," came from the crowd; but the body of its unrest thinned and dwindled as the clamour died away.

"If you forgive him, your hearts will be at peace, feeling that a good deed has been done."

"You do not know how bad he is, elder born."

"It is said, 'What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.'"

The storm having spent itself, silence fell upon the crowd, only an angry voice breaking the calm

here and there, as the last ripples of its resentment died away at the edge.

There was a pause—one of those moments that seem unending whilst sense remains suspended in emotion. The man's life hung in the wind,—a flame flickering amidst invisible shadows. Would light or darkness win?

A word came from the depths of the crowd; the captors loosed their grasp and turned aside with sullen faces. For a moment the prisoner remained half dazed beside the pit; another second, and he was erect. The crowd stood silent as the man passed through its ranks, a bitter word upon his lips. He scrambled slowly up a sloping bank and gained the grass-grown edge of the mountain's spur behind the inn. Here his breath failed him and he paused, his limbs trembling beneath him as he looked back upon the people. The wretch's clothes were torn and stained with red earth, and the skin gaped through. His set face furrowed and broke in fury, the eyes gleaming under drawn brows, and the yellow teeth showed to the gums beneath a canine lifting of the blue-grey lips. He raised one hand painfully to his dishevelled queue, and with a scornful gesture the reprobate, untouched by mercy, disappeared.

The afternoon sun shone on the green plain among the hills, picking out its red-roofed villages. Already there were deepening wells of shadow in the mountain clefts, black, bewitched with the blue of the coming Eastern night. The crowd, half astonished, half pleased by its own behaviour, eddied round the corner of the inn, seeking if possible to learn more about a creed which, while it counsels mercy, teaches also a redemptive justice unknown in heathen lands. And as the people, fresh from an unexpected conquest of themselves, passed beneath the banyan on their way into the church, there seemed to be 'a singing in the branches that was not of the breeze.'

IX. THE POWER OF THE CROSS

ONE sultry afternoon late in the Chinese spring, a group of some twenty men and women were assembled in the guest-room of a red brick house, where once a scholar gathered pupils round him, now used for the purposes of a village church. The river, which flowed through the neighbouring hamlet, had almost disappeared from its bed of granite detritus beside the building, and the rice in the fields hard by languished for lack of water.

The court on which the 'worship hall' of the church opened, was paved with tiles, fan-shaped and marked with curved lines, producing a conventional wave pattern upon its surface. In the centre of it stood a 'Ningpo tub' of goldfish, whilst an unglazed window in the farther wall, with granite mullions carved to represent bamboos, gave on another court beyond. Through this opening, and above the wall, the eye caught glimpses of a glossy tree which filled the place with delicate fragrance.

The back wall of the room where the people were assembled was painted red and decorated with gilded phoenixes, the wings and feathers so arranged as to form circles in a regular pattern, showing that here the ancestral sanctuary of the building had once been.

The male portion of the congregation sat on benches near a raised platform, which served the preacher for a pulpit. Tin-peh the joiner, much in request as a maker of water-wheels and farming implements, occupied his usual place in the front row next the wall, the centre of his face half hidden behind horn-rimmed spectacles, whilst a New Testament, printed on yellow paper, lay upon his knees. Tin-peh's son, Tsang-ah, a boy of ten, sat close by, and struck with the end of his queue at passing flies, whilst waiting for an opportunity to escape his father's eye and slip out for a minute's play or mischief. Ah-Poah, with two companions from a village farther up the valley, were the other occupants of the first bench. In the next row sat Koan-peh and his sons, who had walked ten miles from their mountain farm that morning to be present at the service. Near them was Ah-Kim, lately returned from Singapore, resplendent in new clothes, a silver watch and chain adding much to

his importance, though somewhat distracting the attention of the younger members of the congregation during duller moments in the sermon. Ah-Ko the actor, loose-hung and weary-looking, sat farther back near the door, the effects of plays prolonged till dawn, heavy marches, and the privations of a stroller's life showing in his listless eyes. Khi-peh, straight and decorous in plain dress and white hair, with his small dog snug beneath the bench, sat near, where he could rest his back against the painted panelling. A pathetic figure, with a child in its arms, hovering outside the open door behind the pulpit, was Tin-peh's wife, who, conscious of eyes inflamed in watery red sockets, and cheeks eaten away by some leprous malady, dared not enter. The other women—Ah-Ko's wife, Khi-peh's daughter, and the rest—were placed behind a screen at one side of the church, sore let and hindered by restless children, but doing their best to follow what was going on.

At the close of the service, an elderly man in the long gown and short outer jacket of the literati rose from a chair where he had been sitting near the wall, and began to speak to the people. His clothes and hands were dirty. His forehead was hidden in the depths of a 'wind cap,' or hood, which

fell to his neck and shoulders, and his eyes were almost lost to view amidst deep wrinkles.

"It is true," he said, speaking slowly, "that men should help each other, as the teacher has just told us. To care for the sick, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, is indeed our duty. We ought to show benevolence to those around us. The Supreme Ruler cares for us His children. He sends the rain and gives us food. More than this, He caused the Lord, Ia-so, the holy Sage of whom the teacher has been telling us, to proclaim the laws of heaven anew upon the earth and die for men."

The speaker, who up to this point had been talking in a low monotone, now threw out his arms with an expressive gesture and raised his voice.

"The Holy Man was fastened to a cross like this," he continued, holding his hands at full stretch and turning his eyes from one to the other. "Nails pierced Him here, and here," he added, driving a forefinger into his palms alternately and then returning his arms to their cruciform position.

"Bad men fixed Him to a 'letter-ten frame.'[1] His feet were wounded: He bled: He hung beneath the sun: He died."

The people listened as the voice increased in

[1] The Chinese symbol for ten is shaped like a cross.

volume and the heavily clad limbs made graphic movements. The scholar's pallid face grew animated as, with the dramatic gift of his race, he rehearsed the scene. He saw it all: he lived through it: he agonized. The presentation was a telling one, simple, vivid, full of meaning; and the effect of it, coming unexpectedly as it did upon the congregation, may well be imagined.

"We have our sacrifices," the man continued, "but they are only outward forms with no meaning in them. As 'the Master' indicates, 'sacrifice does not come to a man from without, it issues from within him, and has its birth in the heart.'"

"The Western Sage, of whom you have been hearing, teaches the same thing, calling men to seek more than 'the outer skin' of ceremonial in worship. He gave Himself: He died for us: He teaches men to give themselves for others."

The speaker stopped abruptly, and sat down. It was as if the 'stone general' by the forgotten bridge at the roadside had opened its granite lips and spoken, so unexpected was the utterance. The people waited in silence for some moments after the voice had ceased, then slowly left their places and dispersed.

Mr. Nng Giok, who was a sew-tsai, or scholar of

the first degree, seldom visited the gathering of humble folk at the red house by the river. He was a Confucianist like those of his order; but in the course of general reading he had met with the story of the Saviour, and had been attracted by it. It was strange indeed that he should have penetrated so deeply into the meaning unaided; it was stranger still that he should speak of it in public, despite the bitter prejudices of his class; but strangest of all it was that, having learned and said so much, he should have stopped short where he did. According to the loveliest of Chinese legends, the Goddess Kwan-yin, when about to enter heaven, noticed a cry of anguish rising from the earth beneath her, and, moved by pity, paused as her feet touched the glorious threshold. And there still she waits to help the sad and wretched into that paradise which, for their sakes, she refuses to enter. It was from no such feeling, however, that Mr. Nng halted at the door of happiness whilst in the very act of pressing others to go in. Who shall say what hindrance, subtle or otherwise, what fear or interest, prevented his openly joining the followers of that Sage whose precepts he had proclaimed so forcibly in his unexpected address at the village 'worship hall'? The dead hand of custom and the power of local

politics, the toils of a ubiquitous superstition and the calls of leadership in a village life completely touched to heathen issues—these, on the one hand, and the moral weakness induced by handling truths without the power or will to follow them upon the other, no doubt did much to hinder him.

About two years after the incident here recorded, the preacher who had been present when Mr. Nng Giok spoke in the village church, happened to be in the scholar's neighbourhood and went to call upon him. A mile's walk brought him to his destination, a gaunt house standing by the roadside amidst fields of rice and taro. Passing a roomful of school-boys, who seemed half awed, yet turbulent, he found himself in the reception hall of the establishment. The earthen walls were unplastered; naked beams and pillars of needlewood supported the unceiled roof; the floor of beaten clay was clammy underfoot; but the stark room, though scant of furniture and decoration, was not without a certain gaunt dignity.

The old man received his visitor with grave courtesy, whilst his wife, a delicate-looking woman, set tea and cakes before him. He was full of conversation, speaking of books, of Western civilisation, and of religion. When asked to rejoin the gatherings

at the 'worship hall,' he consented, but with a courteous accent of reserve in his tone, discounting what he said. The conversation flagged; Mr. Nng looked preoccupied, as though something were on his mind of which he wished to speak, yet could not bring himself to utter. At last, when the visitor rose to go, the old man, conquering his hesitation, turned with an earnest look, and, opening his eyes wide in spite of all their wrinkles, said to him—

"I have been reading the story of the Lord Ia-so in the book you gave me."

"Yes, O elder born!"

"It is a strange history. There is something about it which I do not understand," he continued, his expression changing.

"What is that, O elder born?"

"It does not move the passions as the record of 'the Three Kingdoms' does, but it affects one in a deeper way."

"In what way does the story move you?"

"I cannot quite explain it, but when I think of Him who was so good, who taught men what was right, and spent His life in doing works of mercy, my heart is stirred.

"And," he went on, "the other day when I was

reading of how the people badly used and did to death this Holy Man, my eyes were filled with tears of sorrow."

The speaker paused, and then, after a moment's silence, added wistfully, like one awaking beneath the touch of some power hitherto unknown—

"I cannot understand how the thing happened—I wept. 'Twas very strange; I never felt like that before. Can you explain it, elder born?"

X. THE ELEVENTH HOUR

THE curfew from the southern watch-tower had rung forth deep and mellow, its slow notes booming through the city. The sound of passing feet was dying at the Cross, and dead in the thoroughfares, where lights were disappearing one by one. An unwonted illumination, however, broke the sombre line of East Street at the magistrate's yamen, where lamps and torches burned before the gates. The mythological monster, upon a wall opposite to the main entrance, moved in the flickering light, as if at last awakened to its fabled duties, and about to visit with destruction the venalities of a corrupt officialdom. On either side of it the magisterial insignia shot mast-like through the glow, to lose themselves in the night overhead.

A few paces from the yamen gates, and somewhat to the left of them, a body of policemen were keeping guard around a man who hung by the

chin inside a wooden cage. This structure, six or seven feet high by three feet square, was formed of perpendicular bars socketed into wooden frames above and below, the top frame having two movable pieces of wood out of which half-circles were cut, so as to permit the victim's body to be lowered within the bars, his feet swinging clear of the bottom, whilst his head remained outside the cage. A dense crowd filled the area in front of the yamen, pressing close up to the armed guard and their prisoner. It was a strange contrast, that one fixed head higher than all the rest, looking as if it had been laid on a charger, and the surrounding sea of moving faces. The prisoner's features were darkened by exposure to the sun and attenuated by want of food; the nose being preternaturally sharp and meagre, whilst the half-closed eyes paid no attention to the gazing multitude.

The man thus exposed in the 'death cage' had been guilty of robbery with violence upon the high-road between Chinchew and Amoy.

For once Chinese justice had not miscarried, and the right man was suffering for wrong-doing.

At the point we speak of, there was a stir in the

MEMORIAL ARCH NEAR GREAT YAMEN.

STREET-FRONT OF CHINCHEW HOSPITAL.

crowd, as two men made their way towards the spot where the group of guards was stationed, and began speaking to the condemned man. How ghastly the sun-beaten face showed under the lamps, with its blistered lips, its sunken features, and blood-shot yellow eyeballs, a crop of harsh bristles covering the once shaven surface of the crown above the forehead.

"Brother," said one of the new-comers, using the customary salutation of the people, "we have a message for you."

There was whispering among the bystanders as they pulled each other's sleeves in expectation of some fresh excitement. But these men had not brought a pardon for the prisoner, as some people in the crowd at first imagined: they had come hoping that they might point him to another source of consolation.

Too late: why not leave him to die as he was? This was no time to speak of spiritual things to such a soul in such a case. No man could make him understand.

True, but there was One who could, and man might point the soul, with its awakened powers, to Him who said to such another, "This day shalt thou be with Me in paradise." Could the life be

changed as in a moment beneath some spell of words? Nay, not by man, but to the touch of the pierced hands all things are possible.

Folly! What though the wildered sinner says he grasps at God, and hardly comprehending, lets his lost life fall into the Saviour's hands. Delightful folly! How the music of the gospel sounds in the soul at such a moment, when all other systems fall away, and human wisdom sinks in impotent dumbness. How the old simple message rings true in that pause upon the verge of the unseen, when human guilt looks God in the face, and knows it has to die.

Too late? Is Calvary so far, then? May thieves be penitent no more? My brother, had you stood there, with shadows falling round you deeper than the night, outside the lurid circle at the yamen door, and had you seen the misery of heathenism, the powerlessness of man, the might of death, gathered into one living point of agony in the eyes of a tortured felon, you too would have blessed the tender words of the unmerited evangel as a sick child blesses his mother's hand.

It were a folly worth much so-called wisdom, to seek to bring this dying man to that Saviour who understood his need, and it were sovereign joy to

hope that the hand of Mercy might touch him in the night.

The prisoner threw off his indifference as with an astonishing display of strength he thrust his feet sideways against the perpendicular bars of the cage, thus gaining leverage enough to relieve his chin for a moment from the weight of his body.

"What!" he cried to the strangers, despair hunting for hope in his eyes, "can you save me?"

"We cannot save you from the punishment of your crime, my brother,—you have broken the law, and by that law must die,—but still God pities you. He can deliver you from what is worse than death."

"But does God care for me?"

"He does. Though you have wandered from the right way, and wronged His heart by wickedness, He longs for you."

"Is it possible?"

"Yes, and we have come to tell you that God is willing to forgive and to deliver you from doom. He has prepared a way of escape."

"What do you mean?"

"Listen: we cannot rescue you, but your Heavenly Father can save your soul even at this last hour, if you but turn in sorrow from your sin and cast yourself upon His mercy."

"But I am 'an evil son,' a thief, a murderer."

"Yes, it is true; yet, bad as you are, you are still God's child. A wayward, sinful one it is true, but none the less His child. He paid the penalty of your guilt, terrible as it is, long ago. He paid it with the life blood of His Son, who died a felon's death for you upon the Cross. 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.'"

"You say He died for me: how do you know it?"

"God tells us of it in the 'Holy Book' which He has given to men; and besides, He has told us of it in our own hearts. We two men who are speaking to you now know it to be true. Look to this Saviour Christ; look, and He will receive you as He did another dying thief years ago. Tell Him that you do not understand, ask Him to receive you; He knows how, for He Himself has said, 'Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out.'"

"I believe your words: I pray His mercy," gasped the thief.

The man's feet slipped down the bars, and the weight of his body fell again upon the tortured neck and chin. After a pause, he braced himself

once more to listen, and again the strangers spoke such words of hope and love as came to their lips.

At the chill of dawning, when the guards stretched their limbs, flapping the dust from their heavy sleeves and yawning themselves awake, it was known that their watch was over.

"Dead," said a man to his fellow, who was passing along the pavement; "see, his legs hang straight down."

II

CHRISTIAN LIFE: THE RESULT

XI. TRANSFORMATION

CHHIM-HAW is a fishing village by the sea, its red-roofed houses crowding over a narrow promontory, like boys let loose from school; here filling the opener ground, there pushing one another down precipitous places to the water's brink. North of the village lies a sandy bay, whose generous curves recall the sweep of far horizons. This bay is the glory of Chhim-haw, which looks back from its sea-worn point over blue waters, where the wind splashes the waves with flake-white, and the sun scatters flying gold. Landward stretch low dunes and sand-blown farmsteads with glossy saddle-plants on the field edges, spindling sweet potatoes in the drills, and wild chrysanthemums, that shyly star the rocks with yellow.

Where the bay ends and the spit starts seaward, masses of granite break from the sand, rising into weather-bitten hills as the land narrows.

Among these boulders the village finds foothold for its bustling life. Its chief street skirts the harbour, sometimes dropping to the beach level, sometimes transforming itself to rough-built quays. Here twists of flax grass and bales of cotton mingle with foreign-looking boxes, while tubs of shoes, packages of sugar, and bulging bamboo bottles of oil rub shoulders with deep-bellied crates; there fish, both dried and salted, whitened amphoræ containing native spirits, jars of salted vegetables, bundles of tobacco, nets, and bags of rice, are vigorously handled by troops of coolies.

The damp pier stones are hustled by sharp sea-wind and dashed with spray, whilst big junks, sadly reduced each year, it is true, by steamer competition, strain their hempen cables as they tumble heavily in the harbour, or, at the ebb, lie floundered on the sand.

On the day our story opens, a man with shaven head, black turban, and loose blue jacket, paused outside a cotton warehouse near the harbour of Chhim-haw. Glancing through the unglazed windows

at its worn counters, its earthen floor, and low-roofed outer room, he entered the door and mingled with the busy crowd within. Presently, choosing a moment when everyone was occupied, he crept up a narrow ladder at the back of the place, and disappeared inside a loft where cotton bales were kept.

Adroit as Khiu-goan, the hero of the events here recorded, had been, his movements did not escape observation. The owner of the warehouse had noted them. For the rest of the day he kept an eye on the ladder from the desk at which he was posted, and with the patient persistency of the Oriental, he sat on through the night, watching and working until the dawn. Khiu-goan lay close among the cotton bales, not daring to move. Next day the blockade continued, for, busy as the merchant was, he kept the ladder continually in view.

On the second evening the good man sent a servant with eight hundred cash to buy wine and other necessaries for a feast, and had dinner served in his office for two persons. The employees were given a night off, and went to their homes. When the shutters were up, and the door carefully barred behind the last of the

men, the merchant had a look at the table, and, going to the foot of the ladder, called his unknown guest—

"Elder brother," he said, "you must be hungry after two days and a night in the loft; come down and eat with me."

The invitation met with no response.

"Elder brother, come down and fear not," he repeated. "I am here alone, for the men have gone; and see, I mean well by you—your dinner waits."

After some persuasion and many promises, Khiu-goan, finding himself discovered, crept from his hiding-place and descended the ladder. He was stiff and hungry, and not a little abashed; but the merchant was courtesy itself, and presently he found himself seated at his table as if they had been friends for many years. When the meal was nearly over, his host turned to him with the question: "Well, brother, why did you come here to rob me?"

"But, venerable uncle, I——"

"Brother, I have followed the profession myself, and know exactly what you were about when you climbed into my cotton loft. Tell me, why did you come here?"

"I was in debt for twenty dollars, and knew not where to find the money."

"Oh, if that is all, I think that I can help you," said his entertainer, and leaving the table for a moment, he returned with the money in his hand.

Early next morning the merchant rose and sent Khiu-goan away before anyone was stirring.

Some days afterwards one of his sons happened to go into the loft. A gleam of light caught his eye among the shadows. The boy looked again, and there, among the cotton bales, a heap of treasure was lying. It consisted of silver hairpins such as Chinese women wear, with rings, buckles, and other ornaments of the same precious metal. Unable to contain himself for wonder and delight, the lad called loudly for his father. When the merchant saw the silver, he said, "This is the usufruct of the twenty dollars. Our friend has been here to show his gratitude, for honour among thieves is strong."

Khiu-goan's second visit to the cotton warehouse cost him dearly, however. With great daring he had broken into a pawnshop, and carried off, among other things, the silver with which to repay his benefactor. With no less skill

he had evaded his accomplices, re-entered the merchant's premises, and left again unnoticed. But the gang of which he was the leader, greatly dissatisfied by the amount of silver which he had appropriated, demanded its restoration.

"It is true," they said, "that we depend upon your skill and daring in such an enterprise as we have just achieved, and you deserve the lion's share of the spoil, but we ought also to be considered. You endangered your life by breaking into an armed pawnshop, but surely we risked something whilst waiting at your call outside. Why should you rob us of our just proportion of the plunder?"

It was impossible for Khiu-goan to say what had become of the silver. His lips were sealed. The laws of the lawless are inexorable; by them he stood condemned. His reckless followers seized him. A bamboo cylinder, fitting the socket, was placed over each eye in succession; a peculiar tap was given to the upper end, and the ball jumped out. Khiu-goan's career of brilliant burglary was at an end.

We next find our hero at Anhai, the principal trading port of the city of Chinchew. Here he became king of the beggars. These people form a

considerable and almost an independent community within the body politic of most Chinese towns. Over such an *imperium in imperio* blind Khiu-goan now found himself the ragged emperor. He administered its affairs, directing, no doubt, its campaigns of annoyance and other methods for extorting money from the neighbours, settling disputes, assessing blackmail to be paid by shopkeepers and others for the privilege of immunity from clamorous ladrones, detailing skirmishers to scour the country, and leprous or otherwise loathsome mendicants to blockade the doorways of refractory citizens, till loss of custom and disgust should have brought them to terms.

Khiu-goan also became a banker, lending money to the beggars at exorbitant rates. The sums were small, but the interest, payable monthly, was extorted to the last penny. On one occasion he was seen escorting a tatterdemalion debtor under arrest. He had the wretch's queue fast coiled around one fist, and in the other he carried a long bamboo pipe. The street resounded as the pair slowly passed along, a cry from the victim every now and then, marking where the captor had punctuated his clamorous reproaches by a vicious pipe-thrust.

Khiu-goan's ancient craft was not forgotten. Unable to join their expeditions as of yore, he acted as trusted counsellor to the thieves of the district. One day some of them came to consult him on a matter of importance. Foreigners had occupied a building in the town, ostensibly for the proclamation of new doctrines. The place was reported to be full of valuable things, such as lamps, clocks, and watches. Would the venerable master craftsman, who could see better than any of them, pay the place a visit and find out the lie of the land? Khiu-goan having accepted this delicate commission, his first step was to attend the service at the church. He accordingly joined the congregation one Sunday, and listened to strange things: to words chanted after barbarian fashion; to uncanny talking with someone, who, so far as he knew, was not in the room; to presumptuous discoursing, at imminent risk no doubt of His sovereign displeasure, about the Supreme Ruler. The blind thief showed his disapproval of these things by making disparaging remarks, and otherwise disturbing the proceedings; but, in spite of all, there was something in what he heard that impressed him.

After the service Khiu-goan was courteously

entertained by the unsuspecting Christians. They were a miserable, unpatriotic set of people, whose hearts had been changed by pernicious foreign drugs; but the tea they gave him was good, and it suited his plans to sit and talk with them. He became gradually interested in what they had to tell. Besides, they were kind to him, as if his being blind and a beggar made no difference to them. Was it possible that what they said was true—that God cared for men, that death did not end all, that sin might be forgiven? The questions he had meant to ask with burglarious intent died away upon his lips, and feeling strangely indisposed to carry out his investigations, he put them off for the present, meaning to pursue them some other day.

The thieves were surprised by Khiu-goan's report of his visit to the barbarian 'worship hall.' It was quite unlike the spirited performance that had been expected of him. When he continued to attend the services, the beggars grew suspicious, and refused to lead him thither. But when thrown over by his associates, he did not lack guidance, for a Christian lad used to conduct him to church; though the boy's former teacher, happening to meet the incongruous pair, complained bitterly to the lad's father of the disgrace brought upon himself by one of his

pupils associating with so notorious a character as the blind beggar.

Khiu-goan never carried out the thieves' commission, and the plan to rob the church came to nothing. Light broke in upon his mind at last. His heart was blind no longer. The sightless chief of the beggars saw the glorious King, and fell at His feet. A thrill ran through the place when it was known that he had changed his ways.

Before the old man was baptized, he had an interview with the small Christian community of Anhai. In the presence of these friends he produced with fumbling fingers a book, much worn and soiled. It proved to be a ledger of accounts, containing notes of all the sums due from his many debtors, with the interest accruing thereupon. What a record of sordid avarice and cruelty it was may perhaps be imagined by those who have seen usury at work in a land where flesh and blood are available assets, and the scale of interest begins at twelve per cent. per annum. Picture that group of humble people: their rough blue cotton dress, their shaven heads and yellow faces; the blind central figure; the words of confession wrung from a changed heart, as the man who had been forgiven much forgave all who owed him and renounced his

darling sin. A fire was kindled, the book was burned: what represented a fortune to the blind beggar was destroyed.

It was but a gathering of common folk in a dingy room, but the fire of God fell there as the book turned to ashes, and the last sparks died from its crackling pages. Shadows, darker than the shade cast by the guttering lamp upon the earthen floor, lay round those sin-stained lives; but the scene rises into majesty as one looks back upon it, for it is touched by sacrifice, and the glory of the Lamb doth lighten it.

A few days later, Khiu-goan was received into the Church; but so bitterly opposed to Christianity was the heathen community of Anhai, that the ceremony could not be performed within the place. To get over the difficulty thus occasioned, a junk was brought round from Amoy and anchored in the creek not far from the village. When all the preparations necessary for the service had been made, the little handful of Christians slipped quietly through the busy streets, and found their way on board the vessel. There, free from danger of interference, with the tide washing through the inlet, and strange craft dropping seaward under press of brown mat sails, or hauling painfully against the

stream to the creak of oars and the plunging splash of bamboo poles, the floating Church received its congregation.

One can see the swaying low-roofed cabin, the quiet company of worshippers, the grave faces,—that of the blind man with a light in it, as if the reflection of the brazier fire had not wholly died away,—the bowed heads, the simple service, the hush of the ancient rite, the joy of the unseen Master, as Khiu-goan and three others, the first-fruits of Anhai, were baptized into the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, one God.

As to the last scene of all,—where, when, after what fashion was the home-going of Khiu-goan,—I cannot tell you. But I know that the waters were weaving their sea-magic in Chhim-haw Bay, and the sand whispering on the dunes, when the call was given. Whether the tide was flowing beneath the turquoise sky, or ebbing seawards through the darkness, I do not know; but it was setting home for him. And this is certain, that if we knew not the manner of his passing, Jesus did.

XII. BROKEN GODS

AH-CHHOANG'S village clings to the mountain's shoulder, at the lower edge of a small plateau, above which stands the rock-strewn summit of Sang-keh-soa, with its dream-haunted temple. Somewhat higher on the hill is the 'ocean glimpsing stone,' from which at dawn upon clear days the blood-red glimmer of the sun shows upon the distant sea. So steep is the shoulder's edge that the village houses seem to have paused for breath where they stand, as pilgrims do sometimes when climbing to the famous shrine overhead. From Chhoang's front door you pick your steps by an irregular stairway down the slope, till you join a narrow path that skirts the brink of a tumbling stream. The fields of his farm have been cut, one above the other, into the side of the hill, and each one banked at the lower side by a rough stone wall. A little higher up, the head waters of the rivulet have been waylaid, and flow over from terrace

to terrace, watering the green rice as they go, to escape at last from the lowest field of all and splash into their proper channel.

Chhoang's wife was ill, and his sister-in-law, much hampered by hens, pigs, and children,—not to speak of a web waiting half woven upon her loom at home,—was speaking her mind to him.

"We cannot let things go on like this," she said; "the wife is the main stave in the bucket, and without her the home must go to pieces. Consult the priest without delay, and see what can be done to save the house-mother before it is too late."

When Ah-Chhoang paid his visit to the priest next day, he found him taciturn and unresponsive. He presented his gift, however, and told his story; but it was only after much urging and an additional offering that his reverence consented to unbend somewhat and give the needed counsel.

"The trouble arises from the Earth Spirit who sits at your own 'hall head,'" said he. "He is much displeased with you, and has sent a demon to destroy your wife."

"And what does the holy sage consider should be done?" queried Ah-Chhoang, now seriously alarmed.

"My brother, you must buy twelve hundred cash worth of gold paper and incense, together with food

proper for sacrifice, and offer them before the idol. Perhaps such gifts may turn away his anger."

Chhoang followed this advice, and, hurrying from the mountain, brought home paper money, sticks of incense, fat pork, fish, fruit, and cakes with characters stamped in red upon them, from the market of Ho-Chhi. The food was cooked and placed, with piles of white boiled rice, properly ordered upon the altar table in the guest-hall of the house. Three sticks of incense were duly lighted and waved with reverent gestures, as prescribed, before the idol, being then stuck upright in the grey ashes of the family incense burner. Leaves of paper money, each with its central square of imitation gold, were thrown one by one into an iron pot and burned upon the floor. Chhoang approached the god and said, "O Earthly Grandfather, my wife is sick; 'tis you have made her so; be pleased to change your ways and make her better. O Earthly Grandfather, your slave, my wife, is sick; a demon is affraying her; why should you treat us thus? Have we not offered incense at your shrine, and gold, and sacrificial gifts? Have we once failed in due observance of the appointed days? Be pleased to hear my prayer; recall the demon, and restore my wife."

Leaving the hall for a moment, the devoted worshipper entered the sick chamber, where he found the patient somewhat better. Hope and excitement, born, no doubt, of a superstitious belief in his majesty, the Earthly Grandfather, had buoyed her spirits and filled her with expectation of an immediate recovery. He returned to the sacrifice elated. "See," he said to his son, "how profitable it is to serve the idols; your mother is already better, and will soon be well." Then he piled paper money in handfuls upon the fire and offered thanks.

Again the good man entered his wife's room, this time, alas! to find her worse. The excitement had died away; her head was sunk upon the bamboo pillow, and her breathing came slow and painful. Chhoang's rising hopes were changed to disappointment. Sudden anger seized him. He had been deceived, his gifts contemned. Rushing from the room, he seized a wood chopper, and taking the Earth Spirit from his throne, dashed him to the ground and cut him into matchwood.

"What, you"—he said as the hatchet fell, "you would destroy my wife, you, you, you," he cried, making the splinters fly at every word. Then, turning to the other idols that stood upon the altar table, he served them in the same fashion.

THAW-TI KONG, THE EARTH SPIRIT.

Another moment, and Ah-Chhoang had left the house. Down the mountain path he sped, his anger sobering as he went. What sacrilegious rashness, what temerity his had been! There was some cause for anger, but what mad folly to attack the gods. What mortal man might hope to fight against them? Even now, no doubt, the mighty spirit of Thaw-ti Kong, the Earth Spirit, with all the train of injured deities whose images lay shattered in the house, would follow him in dread pursuit. Thoughts such as these spurred him down the stony stairs and slopes by the river and along the slippery edges of paddy-fields on the lower levels.

After our hero had travelled some distance, he met with an acquaintance, who, noticing his disordered dress and manner, stopped on the roadside and spoke to him.

"Why, brother Chhoang, how goes it with you? Is something wrong to-day?"

"Hai-yah! Woe is me! I have great bitterness."

"Why, what has happened?"

"Alas, my father! I am at feud with all the gods."

"What!" cried his friend, "at feud with the gods! That surely cannot be."

Chhoang told his tale: his wife's illness, his sister-in-law's advice, the fruitless offering, his rage and sudden wild revenge. The man's face changed, and he drew back a pace saying, "Yours is trouble indeed, Ah-Chhoang. The gods are strong and can seize men."

Ah-Chhoang's fears redoubled at the words.

"There is, however, one thing which you may do," continued his friend.

"What is that?" cried Ah-Chhoang, swallowing his emotion.

"Listen, and I will tell you. The barbarians have opened a 'worship hall' near the inn by the big banyan tree at Ho-Chhi."

"And what of that?" said Ah-Chhoang, endeavouring to be calm.

"The Supreme Ruler, whom they worship there, is a most powerful God, they say, and much opposed to all the idols. Go quickly to his temple and beg his aid. He, if anyone can, is likely to protect you."

"But in what fashion ought one to approach this foreign God?"

"Do not wait longer here, but hurry on, lest vengeance overtake you by the way. The teacher at the 'worship hall' will tell you what to do."

Down the path sped Ah-Chhoang, ever down through the paddy till he reached the plain, where the mountain torrent became a river, the track still following its course. Hurrying through the market-place of the town, he made his way past the smithy and along a bit of open road. There at last was the banyan tree spreading its wide arms, and close beside it the barbarian 'worship hall.' Was it possible he yet might reach it before the anger of the idols fell upon him?

Bursting into the church, our hero greeted Ah-Chhun the preacher, and Toa-peh his helper, protesting that he had come to worship the Supreme Ruler. They thought him mad, so wild was his eye, so strange the story which he told in breathless, broken sentences. They were gentle with him however, listening attentively to what he had to say, although somewhat on their guard at first. But when he had rested a space and was quieter, they made him tell his troubles over again, soothing his fears and endeavouring to reassure him by showing that the idols were of no account. Had he not seen proofs of this himself? Why, when spiders spun webs upon their faces in the temples, they could not move a finger to brush them away; and when the rats

gnawed holes in their sides for nests, they sat unheeding. Had he seen the broken roof at the shrine upon the Pang-san-nia, where one of the beams had smashed the idols in its fall? The idols were false gods, unable to protect themselves and how much less could they protect or injure men? But the Supreme Ruler, who made the earth and sky, sending the rain and ruling the sun, was mighty, sheltering and upholding men and things. Let him then come and seek His care, like a child creeping to its father's arms.

Ah-Chhoang did not wholly understand all that his new friends said to him, but in his desperation said that he would try to do as they advised. He was not quite comfortable when the good men made him stand with bowed head whilst they spoke aloud to their God in his behalf, although he hoped the mighty spirit, in answer to their requests, would protect him and heal his wife's disease.

Chhoang went back to the mountain with something akin to hope stirring his heart, in spite of dark forebodings. After toiling painfully up, he breasted the slope and saw his house above the climbing path. There it stood as he had left it; no lightning stroke had crumbled it in ashes. But what of those within? He scaled the last of the ascent: with a

gasp he was over the threshold. He reached his wife's room, to find her better. What he had heard from the barbarians was true, then, after all. The idols were no use. The Supreme Ruler alone was mighty. The God of whom the preachers spoke had heard their prayer and spared his home.

The slow days passed as Ah-Chhoang watched his wife regain her health. The altar table stood empty. No sticks of incense smouldered now before the door or under the eaves at close of day, nor in the hall upon the first and fifteenth of the moon. The villagers waited for the misfortune which, they felt, would surely come upon their sacrilegious neighbour. They were disappointed, however; his wife recovered, the children throve, the pigs and chickens did not die, his crops were neither worse nor better than their own.

On worship days Ah-Chhoang left his home at dawn, dressed in his best, a new hymn-book in a blue cover put snugly in his pouch, and a handful of rice or sweet potatoes for the midday meal tied carefully in a bit of cloth. As the Sabbath of God's rest came into his life, fear passed out of it; and though he had too little introspectiveness to have said much about his feelings, he loved

the quiet days spent with the knot of worshipping people, who gathered week by week beyond the hills' last spur, in the little church upon the plain.

Some years went by. The passing days had taught Ah-Chhoang a nobler fear, begotten not of slavery but of love. He worked his fields, spending long days at times cutting fuel among the ferns upon the mountain. It was the old hard life, but with a difference; for more and more, in simple fashion, he sought to serve that One Supreme, beneath the shadow of whose wings he had come to rest. There was a blessing on the scanty life that brought sufficiency. The neighbours wondered, and possibly their prejudices were somewhat shaken. Perhaps Ah-Chhoang had left more superstitions than his own shattered among the broken idols on the floor.

One day the little group of worshippers upon the plain found themselves in a difficulty. It was necessary to replace the lowly room which served them as church by a larger building, and the funds were difficult to find. Time had been spent in making plans and gathering money, but little had come of it, and the brothers of the 'Jesus Church' were losing heart. They met together and talked the matter over. Then they prayed about it.

Next morning Ah-Chhoang walked a distance of some fifteen miles to Chinchew city. Entering by the north gate, he made his way through twisting streets and open spaces to the house of a friend, who might, he thought, help in the matter which lay so closely to his heart. Leaving his shoes in the passage, he removed his turban and let down his queue, in token of respect as he entered his friend's room.

He was 'one who did not understand how to speak words,' as he said himself, but there was an eloquent pucker in his forehead as he told his tale.

"They had discussed the business in every way at Ho-Chhi," he said, "but talking was no use. The funds were short, alas! nothing would make them button over."

"Have you prayed about this matter?"

"Yes; prayer is good. I have prayed, and——"

Here he lifted the edge of his cotton jacket, and thrusting one hand into his pouch, worn sporran-wise, produced a paper package. It proved to be a roll of silver dollars.

"Thus it is, O elder born," he said, speaking hesitatingly, as if about to do something doubtful. "You see I think I can help with the 'small work,'

the unskilled labour of carrying stones and other things, when the building is begun, but how can it be begun if we have not silver in our hands?"

The brown fingers slowly opened the folded paper.

"Here are ten dollars," he continued, and rising he carried them respectfully in both hands and laid them on the table.

"But, brother Chhoang, you can not afford to give ten dollars."

"I sold one of the fields, a field I bought myself," he added deprecatingly, as if to avoid the possible imputation of having alienated any of the ancestral possessions of his family. With that the visitor laughed nervously, as he sat down again upon the edge of his chair; and shifting one bare foot so as to press the toes firmly upon the other, began drawing his turban cloth through his hands.

His friend said nothing, but his eyes dimmed and the words came surging to his lips—

"You're a better man than I am, Gunga Din."

No wonder that churches are built in China, when the love of money, that dearest of all the idols, lies shivered in humble hearts, and simple people like Ah-Chhoang bring such messages from the hills.

XIII. GREATHEART

THE granite road outside the Earth Gate of Chinchew city lay shimmering in the sun, its endless succession of rough-hewn slabs lengthening into an interminable line of white upon the green plain. An east wind scourged the bending grain in the fields, and dried the juices of man and beast; whilst overhead a bleak haze bronzed the cloudless sky and beat down the heat upon the baking soil. There were but few people to be seen among the farm villages and scattered houses of the neighbourhood, though travellers came and went upon the highway.

Toa-peh and his companion followed the twisting road, turning off by side paths every now and then to visit the homesteads and dusty villages lying back from the main route among the fields. In most cases they found them left to the pigs and dogs and a few women and children, not to speak of perverse Chinese goats that wandered everywhere.

Old Toa-peh walked bravely in his loose calico socks and stout patched shoes. He wore a cap of black satin, greasy and somewhat out of shape, topped by a button of twisted red silk cord. His short sleeveless coat, once brown, now bleached a greenish yellow, was worn over a blue cotton robe which nearly reached the ground. He was undersized, the lower limbs being scarcely long enough for the body, whilst the arms were too long. The neck was short, and there was a curvature of the back, though he bore himself like one naturally well made, who had been stunted by poverty and the carrying of heavy burdens in boyhood. His face was that of a peasant, its features plain and roughly put together beneath the dull skin. But the eyes redeemed all. They were quick and bright like a bird's glance, and flashed as he greeted you. To describe them as dark brown with a spark in them would be inadequate. There never were such eyes; eyes so full of fire and tenderness and moving light. The stunted figure, the plain countenance, the ungainly clothing were all forgotten when Toa-peh looked at you.

It had been a blank day for the pedestrians. The villagers were invisible, the world was full of dust and glare, and a hot wind puffed in people's

faces, making the lips crack and the eyelids tingle at the edges. But the companions journeyed on, hoping to find a place where there might be a better opportunity for giving their message.

"You are tired, Toa-peh," said his comrade, breaking a long silence; "let us look for a rice shop, where we may rest awhile and eat."

"Not tired, O elder born," he answered, with a haunting smile which lit up the homely face for a moment, and quickly died away again, as he reiterated—

"Not weary; but some rice would make us both more lively."

On they walked, hoping to meet with a wayside booth where rice, or sweet potatoes, or at least a bowl of gritty vermicelli, might be procured.

"We shall find something at the temple presently," said Toa-peh.

There were half a dozen men and boys sitting under the temple wall, but as it was now late in the afternoon, the vendors of earth nuts, sugar-cane, and sandy biscuits had packed their baskets and gone home.

In spite of the disappointment, Toa-peh stoutly refused to turn back to the city. He would go on, if the elder born himself were not too tired and

hungry. The Heavenly Father knew their need, and would supply it.

The road led from the temple through fields, and for some distance was bare of houses. Another li[1] passed in silence. Presently Toa-peh lifted his head and said, "Perhaps we shall find someone under the tree yonder."

It was a glorious tree, a banyan with a burly grey trunk and mighty branches stretching far on every side. Above the depths of its own cool shadow it rose, a soaring dome of whispering green, touched here and there within its leafy chambers by the magic finger of the sun, and changed to vegetable gold.

Another moment, and the travellers were in the midst of a group of wayfarers who were resting from the heat beneath the big tree. Many of them had open baskets adorned with red and yellow paper flags, a coloured handkerchief being attached to the overarching handle and stretched round one side so as to form a tiny tent or shrine. Within each shrine sat a red-faced idol, lashed to his gilded throne, with cakes and paper money spread at his feet and a stick of incense burning before him. It was a band of worshippers, who had carried their

[1] About a third of a mile.

household images to visit some famous idol in one of the neighbouring temples, and who were now on their way home. Others among the group were coolies, with burdens of merchandise; some again were business men, travelling to or from the city.

With gracious tact Toa-peh introduced himself to these people, slipping naturally from ordinary civilities into deeper things. He spoke of Chhoa, the good mandarin, who in former days had planted trees at every stage upon the roads, that weary travellers might find rest and shade long after he was gone. He told them also of the Heavenly Father who sends the rain, without which no tree can grow, who provides rest also for weary men. The people, indifferent at first, drew closer as they listened to the story, told in plain words but touched here and there with light and a tremor deeper than that moving the leaves overhead.

The idols and their baskets were forgotten; and the sun hung over the western hills, as the little crowd of listeners, oblivious of the miles that lay between them and their homes, waited to talk over the message they had heard and to question further of its import. At last the spell was broken. The men picked up their belongings; the idols went off

swinging in their baskets; the coolies bent afresh beneath their cruel burdens.

Toa-peh, despite his weariness, was a happy man. His plain face was touched by a joy that gave it a positive beauty, which arrested his fellow-traveller's gaze. Perhaps it was only fancy made his friend imagine that the illusive gleam he loved lingered a moment longer than usual. Perhaps the natural forces were abated somewhat for the time being, and allowed the old man's soul to shine more clearly through.

As the two friends set out for home with light hearts, Toa-peh turned to his companion, a merry human twinkle dancing in the brown eyes—

"Are you tired now, O elder born?" he asked.

"No, Toa-peh, I don't feel tired now."

"Are you hungry, elder born?"

"No."

"Neither am I. Is it not strange? And yet"—here the look changed and he added quietly, "We were both tired and hungry before we reached the banyan, but now we are satisfied."

His friend waited; there was more to come.

"It is written that when our Lord was at Sychar 'He being weary sat thus by the well.'"

"Yes, that is so."

"And do you not think that the Master was hungry as well as tired at the time, for the disciples had gone to buy food?"

"Yes, Toa-peh."

"But the woman came, and He taught her, and when the disciples returned He said, 'I have meat to eat that ye know not of.' The disciples did not understand, but I think we do to-day."

Toa-peh was a busy man, for had not his son, the pride of his heart, studied under a foreign doctor, gaining the learning which his plain father had never acquired, and was it not the old man's chief joy to render humble assistance in the western-looking medicine shop they had opened in East Street? Busy as he was, however, he often spared an hour or two from his occupations for the beloved work of preaching. One day, having slipped off on this errand, he was speaking to a crowd gathered in the porch of a temple in the city. The people had listened attentively for a time, when a man, wearing the long robe of the literati, interrupted the discourse.

"What you say is good, but you do not follow it," he asserted.

"We do our best," answered Toa-peh.

"The barbarians have bewitched you. They make men Christians, only to take their hearts and eyes for medicine when they die."

"How do you know?"

"I know very well that the Christians dig out men's eyes."

A movement ran through the crowd, which now grew rapidly.

"That is a damaging statement, teacher; are you able to substantiate it?" said Toa-peh.

He was alone, and all the crowd was against him now, its unreasoning fear of foreigners crystallizing in a moment on hearing the familiar calumny. But there was a strong spirit beneath the gentle bearing of the old man.

"I am a Christian," he exclaimed, catching the scholar by the wide sleeve; "can you prove the charge which you have made against us?"

The scholar laughed and carelessly withdrew his sleeve from Toa-peh's fingers.

"Have you ever seen the Christians digging out men's eyes?" queried the little man, seizing the sleeve once more.

"No," said his opponent.

"Has someone told you about it, then?"

"Yes, many people have told me."

"Can you give me the name of anyone who has seen the Christians doing this thing?"

The scholar hesitated. Toa-peh held him firmly now.

"My surname is Taw," he said, "my unworthy name is Toa; my miserable shop, the Pit-seng tong, is in the East Street, and I am well known in the city. You have made a serious charge against me and my friends. If it is true that we maltreat the dead, we ought to be severely punished. Come, let us go together to the yamen. You can then bring your accusation before the magistrate, and I will defend myself as best I can."

The man laughed nervously and pulled hard to get away, but Toa-peh held him fast. There was a stir in the crowd, which, delighted to see a member of the overbearing literary class put to the worse by one of themselves, began to forget its prejudices, and to favour the sturdy preacher. Two or three scholars now edged their way through the excited people, and said—

"This is a friend of ours; we think you had better let him go."

"I cannot let him go," said Toa-peh, "for he has openly accused me of a grave offence before my fellow-townsmen, and he is bound either to prove what he has said or to go with me before the

magistrate, 'the father and mother of the people,' who will judge between us."

"But our friend is young and inexperienced and speaks unwisely, forgetting to weigh his words at times. He did not really mean what he said about digging out the eyes."

"Oh, if that is so, then take him away," said Greatheart, releasing his grasp upon the scholar's sleeve. "We Christians have no desire to quarrel, for we serve One who teaches love to all, but we must be just as well as compassionate. Tell your friend to be more careful; it is not fair to bring ungrounded charges against innocent people."

The gentlemen of the long gown carried off their companion, looking rather foolish, and Toa-peh quietly continued his address. A hum passed through the crowd, and men glanced at one another. The little man had won.

There was a change in Toa-peh towards the end, the native asperities of his disposition softening, like the crags of some gaunt hill transfigured at sunset.

When he rose to pray among the brethren, his first words were always of the love of God, and the thought that found utterance in his prayers showed itself outwardly in a growing gentleness of bearing.

'The infinite future had invaded this life perceptibly to the senses, like the ocean felt far inland up a tidal river.'

On the last Saturday of his life he visited his friend. He was as full of work as ever, but there was a weary look in his face.

"You are tired, Toa-peh?"

"Oh, nothing to speak of," he answered, the old smile lighting his face with sudden radiance.

It was known on Monday that Toa-peh had taken plague. He had not been among the worshippers at the South Street Church on Sunday, and was said to be sinking rapidly.

There was an ashen look upon his son's face when their friend reached the stricken home.

"My father is very ill," he said; "I doubt whether he will know you."

The old man's bed had been brought from his room and laid between the pillars of the guest-hall. It was a bad sign, for this is customary when death is near in China. Drawing back the thick mosquito curtains, the visitor could scarce make out the diminutive figure lying beneath a voluminous grey quilt.

"Toa-peh," he said, "Toa-peh."

There was no reply.

Gently folding down the coverlet, he pronounced the

name again, but without getting any response. "Toa-peh," he said, "don't you know me, your friend?"

There was no movement.

It was too late, then. The little man had slipped beyond the call of earthly voices thus swiftly. How strange! was this to be the end, the parting after many days together? A fresh thought struck the visitor, and bending over the bed once more, he said, "Toa-peh, do you know Jesus, your Saviour and your Lord?"

There was a movement beneath the quilt. The bystanders folded it farther back, and the dying soldier of the Cross slightly raised his head. A gleam flickered in the heavy eyes, the old look flashed for a moment, and then the lids closed. He could not speak, but he tried to get upon his knees beneath the coverlet of the bed. His friend, understanding the unspoken wish, prayed with him, commending his soul to God. Then silence fell, and so they parted.

The banyan spreads its shade beside the Earth-Gate road, and travellers come to sit under its branches till they hear the long miles calling, and rise to go; but, beyond the last stage of the earthly journey, there is another tree, in which a breath whispers ceaselessly, and there is rest unbroken beneath its shadow.

XIV. 'THE HUNDRED OF HIS DESIRE'

TANTAY is a prosperous red brick village lying to the south of Chinchew city. North of it the peaks of Sang-lin-soa bare their stony breasts to the changing sky, and some miles away a small pagoda juts from a rock, past which the river flows eastwards to the sea. On every side lie breadths of cultivated land, cut here and there by granite pathways, or gashed by creeks and wide canals; for the village lives amphibiously, drawing the great world to itself by waterways, which join it to the river and the sea. Thus the farmer from the furrow hails the seaman on the deck, as homing junks steal towering by upon the making tide. Its inhabitants, some ten thousand in number, are surnamed Teng, the descendants of Mohammedan ancestors who flourished greatly during the Ming, or Brilliant Dynasty, between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries of our era.

Several hundred years ago, the villagers, influenced by one of their number, a high official at the court of that time, forsook their Moslem faith. This man had won approval from the Emperor by his abilities, but the creed he followed stood between him and the highest honours. The Son of Heaven, valuing his minister's services, gave orders that every means should be employed to convert him from following the Prophet to Confucianism, but without success. At last the Emperor devised an expedient by which to win the obstinate Mohammedan. An invitation was issued, commanding Mr. Teng to be present at a ceremonial banquet where, by ancient usage, it was necessary to worship the Sage Confucius. The loyal minister, confounded on receiving this mandate, burst into the exclamation, "What ever shall I do? To obey is to deny the faith and sin against my ancestors; to refuse is to offend the Emperor."

The claims of present interest, however, outweighed his religious scruples, and, resolving to please the living rather than the dead, Teng went to the feast and joined in worshipping the Sage. Having thus renounced his own creed, like the fox in the fable he succeeded in persuading the villagers to follow his example. In this way the people of

Tantay were turned from their Mohammedan traditions; but though they conformed in general to the pagan ways around them, perhaps they never have become so fully heathen as their neighbours. There are fewer images in their homes, and such idols as they worship are not placed so prominently within the guest-hall, but stand upon a shelf fixed on a beam above men's heads. At certain festivals also their offerings differ somewhat from those used in neighbouring villages, flour and the blood of goats being among the sacrifices made at Tantay on such occasions. Centuries have passed since the villagers ceased to gather with the Faithful within the city, where but a dwindling band of worshippers assembles in a modern mosque of pounded earth and timber beside the roofless walls of the ancient sanctuary, once glorious, but now fallen into decay.

About the year 1891, a wandering colporteur passed through the streets of Tantay, and happened to sell a copy of St. Mark's Gospel to a small shopkeeper, named Han-tsu-peh. The purchaser of the little volume was a sort of village wise man, one of those interesting personalities to be met with at rare intervals in China, who live simply, and in their own fashion seek for higher things, joining a certain

measure of personal uprightness with an endeavour to lead their neighbours in good ways.

Having bought the little book, Han-tsu-peh, when his day's work was done, would sit cross-legged upon the counter of his shop, reading it aloud in Chinese fashion. Among those who gathered round to listen to the reading, was a young man named Ah-seh, who, being interested by what he heard, borrowed the book afterwards and read it carefully for himself. The story of the gospel attracted him greatly. There were things in it which he did not understand, but Han-tsu-peh helped him by explaining them according to his lights, and more important still, the good man showed him that the precepts which it taught were intended to be followed, to the best of a man's ability, in ordinary life. Before his death, which happened soon after, Han-tsu-peh had cast seed into the heart of several of his neighbours which was to bring forth fruit in the future.

Two or three years later, another visitor came to the village bringing books for sale, and, as he passed along one of the side streets, a trader hailed him, inviting him to enter his shop.

"Come," said Ah-seh, for it was he, "and let me see your books. I am interested in them,

for I have read 'The Glad Sound's record of Ma-Kho.'" [1]

When the stranger entered the premises, Ah-seh bought copies of every book he had, and, when the purchases were completed, gathered his friends into the shop, and made the man tell them what he knew about the Western teacher who was so wise and good. The stranger captivated his audience, and, when he had finished speaking, the people bought up the remainder of his stock, after which Ah-seh gave him his dinner and sent him back to the city.

The visitor's words had stirred the man's heart, reminding him of things which he had learned from Han-tsu-peh in bygone years. Perhaps heredity, if not a streak of alien blood derived from Mohammedan ancestors, quickened the pulsing hope for a religion free from idols and superstition. Was it possible that he had found the secret of a worship purer even than the cult of his village fathers, the truths by which the Ancient Kings had walked, now at last made manifest to all?

A thought began to shape itself in his mind, a hope that China might yet break free from the degrading superstitions of idolatry and return to

[1] Literal rendering of the Chinese title of St. Mark's Gospel.

the worship of the Supreme Ruler, and thus the 'black-haired people'[1] might regain its former glory.

One day, at the close of a Christian service which had been held in a native house by the river, outside the South Gate of Chinchew, the worshippers were making the usual offerings, when a stranger, who had been present at the gathering, gave some small silver. The man who was engaged in making the collection, however, hesitated to receive the money, saying, "As a rule we decline gifts from those who perhaps may not understand the purposes for which such donations are intended."

"Take the money," insisted the stranger; "like you, I seek to serve the Supreme Ruler."

Still the man hesitated, upon which the other said—

"I see you do not remember me, Mr. Giah; you have forgotten your visit to Tantay, and how you spoke to the people in my shop."

It was Ah-seh, who, resolved to find out more about the meaning of the little book, had travelled six or seven miles to attend the humble church. From that day he became a constant worshipper

[1] A classical name for the Chinese nation.

within its walls. By and by he brought a friend with him to the services, then two, and a little later three companions.

From the first the learner made it a practice to carry away as much as possible of the teaching which he heard on Sundays, so as to repeat it afterwards to his neighbours on returning to the village. In this way, many of the Tantay people were interested, and afterwards went to make acquaintance for themselves with the gathering outside the city wall. His idea that China might yet be restored, by a return to purer worship, thus took practical shape in the effort to bring others under the influence which had changed his life.

About nine o'clock one morning, a group of people reached the extensive building, already occupied by the adherents of the new faith, in the South Street of the city. The women belonging to the party passed through an opening to the right and joined those of their sex already gathered within, whilst the remainder of the company entered the main door, finding places on the men's side of the church. One of the latter, a well-clad, stalwart-looking individual, with a broad face, a round head, bent nose, and eyes that glittered as he looked to right and left of him, carried a bundle done up in

a red and yellow bandana handkerchief. When his companions had seated themselves, he opened his bundle, and, having distributed among them the books which it contained, prepared to join in the service. Ah-seh, whose following of fellow-worshippers was steadily increasing, had brought them to see the largest church inside the city.

That afternoon the company from Tantay visited the foreigner's house. They had come to ask that a teacher might be sent to their village who could tell them how to worship the Supreme Ruler. Unfortunately, there were difficulties in providing either a suitable man, or a place in which services might be held. Nothing daunted, however, they pressed their claims more vigorously.

"This is a matter beyond our strength, I fear," said their host; "we must think it over and pray about it."

"Then let us ask God about it now," said Ah-seh, and forthwith he and his friends knelt down upon the floor. It was not enough that their host should voice their desires for them; and when he had finished praying, Ah-seh, whose heart was full, burst into ejaculatory petition. His companions followed one after another, blunderingly enough, but with an earnestness that lifted the

ENTRANCE TO SOUTH STREET CHURCH.

broken utterances into worship. When the last prayer had been offered, they rose from their knees, made their adieux, and left the room.

Accustomed to lead as well in the village counsels as in the fights and quarrels of the clan, Ah-seh employed all the energy that he had formerly spent on these matters, to advance the cause which he had made his own. From the first, he set himself to win a hundred men to the discipleship of the Divine Sage whom he had discovered. These were to form the nucleus round which the new community might gather, a community in which the ancient sayings, 'Man is heaven-born' and 'All within the four seas are brethren,' were to be recognised and acted upon. The brotherhood of which he dreamed was a Christian clan, whose members should hold together for mutual support, defence, and counsel. Benevolence and righteousness would reign within it, and thus the kingdom of the Sages, a growing moral force, drawing all under heaven within it, would shape itself at length in outward power.

In order to further his plans, he saw that it was necessary to have some place prepared, where all could meet together for fellowship and instruction.

The Chinchew Christians, however, had no means of providing him with the necessary rooms.

After a week or two, he revisited his friends within the city.

"We must have a teacher at Tantay," said he.

"But alas we have neither the man to send nor a place to house him," answered his adviser.

"A teacher must be found, for the place is ready, and we need a man to fill it."

"Do you mean that you have prepared a preaching hall?" queried the other wonderingly.

"Yes, it is ready; you must come and see it, elder born."

A visit paid shortly afterwards to the village, showed that Ah-seh and his friends had not been idle. They had rented a shop in the main street, and altered it sufficiently to suit their purposes. The floor had been swept, the walls cleared of paper and cobwebs, and the rafters cleansed. A wooden screen, topped by chintz curtains, ran lengthwise down the interior, cutting off a section for the use of the women. A raised platform of wood, with a table and chair upon it, stood at the end farthest from the entrance, whilst benches had been placed to right and left of the screen to seat the worshippers. Lamps were suspended from the

beams, a bronze gong hung upon a peg behind the door, and a clock ticked upon the wall. A request backed in such fashion could hardly be denied; in spite of obstacles the teacher was obtained, and the brotherhood began its gatherings at Tantay.

Not long after these arrangements had been so happily made, fighting broke out near the village, during which a member of the new community was seized upon the high-road and imprisoned within a plague-infected house. Ah-seh and his friends went to the rescue, but their efforts were fruitless, the enemy refusing to release their prisoner without a ransom. In the natural course, Ah-seh would have gone to the heads of his own village, who, in accordance with the local usage, would have done their best to rescue a fellow-clansman. But their refusal to worship ancestors and to share in village feuds had estranged the followers of the new faith from their natural protectors. The village head-men would do nothing for them.

In this difficulty Ah-seh journeyed to Chinchew, making sure that the men of influence among the followers of the 'Jesus Church' within the city would help him to free his brother. Nothing could be done for him there, however, as the matter fell entirely within the jurisdiction of the magistrates, since the

capture had been made in connexion with a village feud, not because of persecution. Ah-seh was stunned by the disappointment. His hopes and aims were dislocated. The love and mutual aid of the new society to which he trusted, had melted into abstractions at the touch of trouble.

To one whose words led him to action, whose thoughts passed almost immediately into practice, and who estimated things by their use, the sudden disillusion was a poignant trial. It was the new convert's first practical lesson that the kingdom he had entered was not of this world, and it was a bitter one. But though his expectations had been dashed, he would not abandon his friend. Thrown back once more upon himself, he returned to make the best of matters at home. His efforts were successful, and the difficulty was arranged ; for, in spite of the unjust humiliation involved, the ransom was paid and the man was liberated.

After several skirmishes, the feud in which the district had been involved burned itself out, and the dispute was settled by the magistrates, as it ought to have been at first. The chief culprits were condemned to pay heavy fines, and a posse of yamen runners was ordered on a certain day to visit the villages which had been concerned in the fighting,

and bring the various offenders to reason. Ah-seh and the other Christians who had taken no part in the feud now found themselves in a difficult position. The heathen members of the community, offended by their refusal to back them in the recent quarrel, would no doubt take revenge by inducing the officials to billet their followers upon them, whilst the yamen runners, for their part, would be only too delighted to pillage individuals who had placed themselves outside the ordinary mutual protection of village life.

Our hero and one of his comrades again sought out their friends within the city, and asked them to petition the magistrate for protection during the approaching visitation. On the impossibility of interfering with matters of local government being pointed out to them, Ah-seh was much distressed. From the first he had been told that the Church did not meddle with politics, but for one accustomed to co-operative aid in every grouping of the local life, this was difficult to understand.

"If you will do nothing to protect your people, soon you will have no people to protect," said he; "we may as well close our doors at once." Bitter as this fresh disappointment was to these children in the faith, they weathered the storm, suffering

little from the coming of the yamen runners; and though some people, who had been attached by doubtful motives, fell off at this time, the brotherhood pursued its way uninjured.

Ah-seh's thoughts rearranged themselves after these troubles, and he gave himself as strenuously to his task as ever. Trust struck deeper, as he bowed his spirit to the failure of cherished hopes. There was something noble in the strong humility with which this leader of men avowed the Supreme Ruler as his King: had proof of his sincerity been demanded, it would have been discovered as much in the patient loyalty which carried him through this crisis, as in the suffusing of the keen eyes and the tenderness that softened the firm mouth when, before his fellows, he confessed his faith in Christ.

Soon the premises upon the main street at Tan-tay were not large enough for the company that gathered there. Moreover, the Chinese genius for instruction saw instinctively that if the new ideal were ever to be realized, not only must men and women be taught, but also the children must be trained from infancy and brought to take their place within the new society. For this purpose a school and schoolmaster's house were necessary. Guest-rooms and other offices, as well

as a larger place in which the truth might be proclaimed, were also needed. In spite of the fact that there was little or no help to be had from outside sources, Ah-seh did not lose heart in view of these requirements. With him, to think was to act. He talked the matter over with his fellow-villagers, and one of them, almost as enthusiastic as himself, gave two shops, which were thrown together and furnished for the weekly gatherings of the community. These he made over by deed of gift, to be used for the worship of the Supreme Ruler by the people of Tantay and their descendants for ever. Next door were some rooms attached to the ancestral temple of Ah-seh's branch of the village clan; these were also acquired by the help of this generous friend, for a school and teacher's house.

The necessary accommodation having been provided in this way, Ah-seh worked hard to fill it. He had readjusted his ideas on discovering that his city friends would not interfere in local politics, even where the welfare of the new community seemed to be at stake. He would work out his ideal in his own way, depending as little as possible upon outside help. The brotherhood would band itself for mutual support in the following of Christ, much as village people joined their

forces to protect each other from extortionate officials and greedy neighbours. The larger the body thus associated, the greater its influence and the more considerable would be the help which it could give its members. It was therefore desirable to gain adherents as quickly as possible. But at this juncture a fresh difficulty arose, for the teacher obtained with such difficulty to instruct them, had to leave Tantay.

Ah-seh and his helpers worked bravely, but they felt their lack of knowledge and the need of someone able to help them in winning their heathen neighbours. Again they visited the city, but the man they needed was not forthcoming. Ah-seh did all that was in his power to influence those concerned, but in vain, for no one could be spared at that time to go to the village. It was difficult for such a nature to take no for an answer in matters connected with the cherished enterprise, or to imagine that any work elsewhere was more important than that in which he was engaged.

At this time Ah-seh, finding it impossible to escape the penetrating intimacies of Chinese life by other means, was in the habit of slipping out at night to spend hours walking up and down the fields. There he could be alone amid the sheltering dark-

ness, as he pled with God to send a man to work among the Tantay people.

He cried aloud and wept in agonies of supplication. His impetuous practical nature was severely tried by this unexpected obstacle in the path. It touched his faith. The work which was religion to so active a spirit was being hindered, and Heaven did not seem to care. This was the thought that irked beneath the trouble, making it a keen distress.

Ah-seh's worn face showed how sore was the conflict through which he passed during these days, but while he suffered sternly, he did not relax his efforts. If his companions could not have a trained instructor, he at least should gather them together and teach them all he knew.

Our hero's belief in the ultimate extension of Christ's kingdom did not waver, and even in the midst of disillusion and trouble he was ever working towards this end. Finding that several rooms connected with the ancestral temple, next door to the new school, had been mortgaged to various people, he quietly bought the mortgages up with the help of his friends. This he did in the hope that the shrine, so long used for superstitious observances by his own division of the village community, might

yet be consecrated by them to the worship of the one true God.

It was a scheme difficult to carry out, risking as it did the wrath of the clan; but to the heart of this village kingdom maker it was the most natural thing in the world. Accustomed to lead his sept, "a man who had a right to speak," was it not his duty to conduct them to higher things? And as he brought them one by one within the discipleship of the 'princely man' Christ Jesus, it was surely fitting that a place worthy of this higher worship should be prepared. How could they honour their fathers better than by following what their leader believed to be the paths sought after by the Ancient Kings, worshipping the Supreme Ruler in the family temple? Such worship, far from being an offence, would be more truly filial than the superstitious offerings made within the shrine in bygone years.

In time the longed-for teacher was obtained, and the work at Tantay resumed its former course. The numbers attending the 'worship hall' varied greatly, but Ah-seh was constant in prayer and labour, ever looking forward to the time when the hundred he had set himself to win should be attained. It was an uphill task. Some who joined the gather-

ings at the little church from curiosity, or from an expectation of material benefit, soon changed their minds, and others followed their example later. In spite of these and other troubles, our hero plodded bravely on, slowly learning that the Kingdom cometh not with observation. His hopes were often staggered, but, perhaps for this reason, his heart crept deeper into the counsels of the Master, and he had the joy of knowing that through his efforts a way had been opened up which joined his native village to the sea—the infinite ocean of a life beyond earth's cares and sorrows.

Ah-seh, like One greater than he, was not to find his kingdom in this world; he never saw the hundred of his desire. The strong worker was suddenly struck down by fever. When it was known that he was sick, the people whom he had taught and counselled gathered round his bed with an almost fierce devotion. They brought physicians from the city, and nursed their dying leader night and day, but he refused the aid of foreign medical skill; for, though he had given his heart to Christ, he never had accepted Western civilisation or ideas. A true Christian, he was true to his own country, a Chinaman unaltered to the last.

When the end came, peace fell upon Ah-seh's

spirit, for he saw that the gates of the shadow of death were but the way to the dwelling of light! So the struggle ceased, and the work he loved dropped from his burning hands, but the dream he dreamt may yet be realized, when 'the way of the Ancient Kings,' made plain by Christ's perfect revelation, shall lead the 'black-haired people' home.

XV. THE STRONG RUNNER

THREE men stood on the top of Liong-goan Soa. Beneath their feet the cultivated land stretched outwards to the north. To east and west rose scattered hills, whilst the Anhai creek wound southwards through mud flats, like a serpent making for the sea. One of the travellers, Song-peh, was a slightly made man, straight-limbed and alert, with a compact head, quick eye, and a varying expression, so lively as at times to make those who talked with him forget the wilderness of wrinkles upon his yellow cheeks. The second of the trio, who wore the blue robe of the literati, was taller, sinewy in build and decorous-looking; whilst the third was a foreigner, who towered above his two companions.

The three explorers, after surveying the surrounding country, employed themselves chiefly in studying the city of Chinchew, which lay some ten miles off, just where the mountains cut the plain to the north.

By means of a pocket telescope they were able to make out its houses, deep among trees, with the containing line of a fortified wall drawn sharply round them, and two pagodas rising over all.

There stood the so-called virgin city, whose defences, according to the more than doubtful legend, had never yet been carried by a foe. Famous for learning and the number of officials which it had bestowed upon the Empire, Chinchew had for centuries been barred to foreign intercourse by pride. Few Western feet had passed its gates since the Mongol occupation and the days of Marco Polo, save perhaps when some adventurous trader, Arab or Portuguese, had visited the place. When the three companions had completed their investigations, they knelt down together upon the mountain top, and prayed that the crowding population of that distant city might yet receive a full revelation of that truth of which it had hitherto seen but partial and passing gleams.

Shortly after the reconnoitring expedition to the mountain, Song-peh and his friends succeeded in entering Chinchew. The high-roads, formerly notorious for robbery and violence, had recently been cleared of thieves by an energetic mandarin, and the travellers made the journey inland from the

port without difficulty or molestation. When the last breadth of rice-fields lay behind them, and the granite pathway had transformed itself into a suburban street, the explorers crossed a long bridge, fortified at either end, and, passing a double gate, found themselves at last within the ancient walls.

The narrow thoroughfares of the city were full of people who hung about the strangers, hampering their movements. It was therefore with a sense of relief that at length they came upon a roofless mosque in Earth-Gate Street, where the pressure lessened and they could breathe more freely. There, under the shelter of high walls, banded with arabesques which showed upon the granite like broidered work of grey and silver, beneath the open sky, the truth of the evangel was, so far as we know, first proclaimed within the city. The people in the ruined mosque, torn between curiosity and suspicion, yet more at ease than in the crowded streets outside, listened to what the visitors had to say, though some of them looked sourly on the strangers, as if resenting their presence.

After speaking to this difficult audience for some time, and having explained the reason for their visit to the city, the three comrades left the Monastery of

Ceremonial Reverence, and went to seek for quarters in East Street, where travellers, as a rule, are sure of finding lodgings. Their efforts, however, were not successful, the innkeepers with one consent refusing to receive them. The people pressed upon them with cries as they walked along the pavements, and, but for the density of the mob, the street urchins and loafers would have attacked them with tiles. It was therefore necessary to move slowly, keeping to the narrow thoroughfares and avoiding wider spaces, where the crowd might open out enough to begin throwing missiles.

As it was most desirable, from their point of view, to avoid a riot, our travellers now determined to retrace their steps and look for quarters outside the city. Spent and footsore, they pushed slowly through the streets, until they reached the gate and found their way to the riverside, where merchant seamen congregate. There, after some searching, at last they discovered a squalid lodging-house, mud-floored and roofed with blackened timbers, where they passed the night.

Early next morning, after prayer together, the visitors once more plunged into the crowd, and, threading the devious streets, found the mosque, where they preached to the people as before.

ENTRANCE TO THE MOSQUE IN EARTH STREET.

This they did for several days, revisiting the city in the same manner, only to be driven out again at nightfall, to seek for lodgings in the shipping quarter by the river.

On these occasions, tact and gentleness were needed at every turn, so as to avoid collision with the inhabitants, whose traditional abhorrence of the outer world was excited by the advent of a barbarian in their midst. But the pluck and quick resourcefulness of Song-peh and his companions did much to smooth the way at difficult corners, their quiet words winning many a victory over the prejudices of the crowd. Thus by self-restraint and Christian courage the breach was won, and the gospel of God's love was published within the ancient city.

About a year later, Song-peh had occasion to use his abilities in dealing with circumstances of quite peculiar difficulty. The authorities, unable to believe in benevolent intentions on the part of foreigners, made sure that some political design lay behind the appearance of a Western stranger at Chinchew, and determined, if possible, to prevent a repetition of the visit.

The officials therefore arranged that a check to the stranger's advances should be given, far enough

away from headquarters to be afterwards repudiated by themselves should any complications arise in connexion with it. Thus it would be possible to attain their object without showing their hand in the matter; for a street riot at a trading village was scarcely likely to be traced to them, nor would it be so risky as a tumult raised within the city, for which they would be held more or less immediately responsible. Secret instructions were therefore issued that when the unwelcome visitor appeared again at the port of Anhai, trouble should be made for him there, and everything done to prevent his journeying northwards.

At the time we speak of, an opportunity for the execution of this plot arose in a curious way. The foreigner, who had returned to Anhai, and was spending a few days there with Song-peh and his friends, happening to come suddenly from behind a wall, surprised a little boy at play upon the street. The child, startled by the unexpected apparition of a bearded figure, strangely clothed and wearing an enormous sun-hat, raised a cry of 'barbarian,' and fled; but, unfortunately, he stumbled in his flight and fell upon the road. On this, the stranger, distressed by the piteous crying of the little one, advanced to raise him from the ground,

when the frightened infant, imagining he meant to dig out his eyes, as foreigners were said to do, shrieked more loudly than ever.

The men and women in the neighbouring houses, hearing the outcry, came running to the spot, and saw the child lying on the street with a stranger bending over him. A shout was raised immediately that one of the village children had been seized. More people hurried up, filling the streets and spaces near the church as if by magic. Only a few by-standers, at the centre of the concourse, were in a position to inquire as to what really had happened; but they were far too much excited to do so, and the bulk of the crowd, seeing only the tall figure of the Englishman at the centre of an agitated group of men and women, spread wild and contradictory reports of what was going forward.

A wave of fanatical rage, such as sometimes takes possession of the Chinese, 'who have a strange faculty for going mad in cold blood,' now passed over the mob, sweeping through the town and extending to the surrounding district, until the whole population was in an uproar.

Whilst all this was happening, Song-peh and some others, attracted by the tumult, had pressed

through the middle of the crowd to where their friend was standing, and persuaded him to take refuge with them in the church.

Meantime, the people began to throw stones upon the roof of the building into which the foreigner had retreated, some of the missiles reaching even the small central court of the place. An attack was also made upon the outer door, which quickly gave way, and a crowd of the assailants effected an entrance. The foreigner, seeing that the best thing to be done under the circumstances was to face the mob outside, now left the house, and advanced into the midst of the uproar amid a storm of bricks and tiles.

A momentary silence followed this bold step, of which the stranger took advantage to reason quietly with his assailants, hoping to pacify their minds; but some of them, bent on mischief, attacked him whilst in the act of speaking, striking his arms and shoulders with the backs of their heavy wood-choppers, until he fainted and fell to the ground. In another moment he would have been trodden under-foot by the crowd had not Song-peh and one of his companions dashed out at the risk of their lives and dragged him from among the feet of the people. They succeeded by a superhuman effort in conveying

him safely within the church again, and promptly barricaded the broken door.

By this time darkness was falling. The mob, having spent its fury for the moment, and sobered by fear of possible reprisals should they by their violence have killed the foreigner, melted away in quest of supper. Song-peh and his companions, meanwhile, knowing that their enemies would soon return, made use of the respite thus granted them to prepare for immediate flight.

The Englishman having recovered from his swoon, the first step was to disguise him in a long robe and Chinese shoes, covering his unshaved head with a turban and tucking his tell-tale beard beneath the upper edge of the robe. The next thing was to leave the half-wrecked church as speedily as possible, for it was bound to yield immediately to the next assault brought against it. To leave it unobserved, however, was no easy matter; for the doors were watched from the outside and the streets in the vicinity were impassable. It was Song-peh who devised a way out of the difficulty. If the roads were blocked, the tiles were free.

Our hero accordingly conveyed his friend to the roof at the back of the premises by means of a ladder constructed of tables and other furniture,

piled one piece upon the top of another, inside the central court of the building. From the roof of the church the fugitives passed to that of a neighbouring house. Carrying their shoes in their pockets, and moving with the greatest caution, so as not to disturb the inmates beneath, they crept over the tiles until it was possible to clamber on to the next building.

Song-peh, who lived near by and knew every nook and corner of the place, led the way; and, edging ever farther from the place of danger, they crept onwards until at length, after careful reconnoitring, they were able to drop into an unfrequented lane, cross to a low wall on the other side of it, and climb by means of an outhouse to the roof beyond. From this point the danger of discovery, though still considerable, was not so great as before. On they went, now moving on tiptoe over the ridges, now pausing in breathless silence, until a series of adventures brought them to the roof of Song-peh's own dwelling, and in another moment they were safe inside its friendly walls.

It was not expedient for the fugitives to remain long in Song-peh's house, however, for a sound of distant shouting told them that wild work was already going forward at the church, which no

doubt the rioters were then engaged in pillaging. The only chance of escape, therefore, was to leave the village whilst the crowd was still occupied in its work of destruction. One of the family having carefully reconnoitred the neighbouring lanes and passages, reported them clear; so Song-peh and his companion slipped out of the house, and, taking a circuitous route, soon left Anhai behind them, making their way to the creek. Fortunately, there was no one stirring by the water's edge as they pushed on in the darkness over the slippery mud-banks. At last they found a junk by which the foreigner had travelled from Amoy anchored in the creek, where it had remained for use as sleeping quarters during his stay at the port. Here Song-peh said farewell to his friend on board the boat, after a warm welcome from the crew who had been anxiously awaiting their arrival. The anchor was lifted, the mat sail went creaking up the mast, and the vessel disappeared into the shadows.

The trouble which had risen so unexpectedly at Anhai blew over after a time. Meanwhile Song-peh held to his post. Practical Christianity is quickly learned in the midst of persecution, and our hero profited so much by his experiences in this hard school that presently we find him busy

telling others of the truth which he himself had found. He spent much time in this work among the villages near Anhai, with varying success. Once more the opposition of the literary class broke into open war, and he was seized, beaten, and thrown into prison; whilst one of his companions was brought before the magistrates and cross-examined. But both these brave men came safely through the ordeal, and, when set at liberty, continued their labours as if nothing had happened.

In spite of failings, Song-peh had a loyal heart. The 'stalk of carl hemp' in him lent a stubbornness to his character which enabled him not only to bear shrewd blows, and the local contumely which held him traitor to the people's gods, but also to endure the physical drudgery of toil and marching beneath an Eastern sun. Love to the Master kept him steadfast, whilst persecution, playing on his life from every quarter, wore many a fault away.

Song-peh with his Anhai friends, who had taken Chinchew as their special field of work, had in the meantime succeeded in renting a small house within the city, where they had begun to tell the people of the Saviour Sage, an Eastern

like themselves, who came to lead the nations back from the folly of idolatry to serve the Supreme Ruler.

The Chinchew literati, indifferent enough to the advent of a fifth religion,[1] but jealous as always of foreign interference, set to work to stir up trouble. With this end in view, they published a placard calling upon the people to eject the intruders; this they followed up by organising an attack upon the new 'worship hall,' a band of roughs, led by one of their number, wrecking the building and driving out the men in charge of it, one of whom had the clothes torn from his back and barely escaped with his life.

As it was important that news of what had happened should reach his friends without delay, the local post being unreliable, Song-peh volunteered to act as courier upon this occasion. The service was an arduous one, and the messenger did not spare himself, speeding over the granite causeways between the rice-fields, climbing the paths among the hills, and dashing past inns and wayside villages, till he reached the goal. In this way he

[1] Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Mohammedanism were already in the city.

travelled the nineteen miles between the city and Anhai three times in succession, traversing nearly sixty miles without halting, save to snatch hurried meals or whilst replies to his dispatches were being written.

After years of useful service as a teacher of the new faith, Song-peh retired to his home at Anhai. The house from which the foreigner had escaped so narrowly in bygone days had been replaced by a new church, built in the main street of the village, to accommodate three hundred people, with schools and offices attached. A growing congregation now filled this building, under the care of an ordained native minister. Things had changed much since the young man, with his three companions, passed trembling through the busy streets and found his way on board the junk,—fit symbol of the Church that preserves the faith through floods and storms, — but the heart baptized upon the waters that day beat true as ever.[1]

Song-peh loved God's house. There was a seat beside a pillar on the front bench of the Anhai Church where the old man used to sit, with broad-rimmed spectacles upon his nose and a large

[1] Song-peh was baptized at the same time as Khiu-goan : see p. 149.

'character' Bible open before him, his unbroken figure, with its snowy hair and white moustache, contrasting strongly with the mass of dark-haired people in the congregation. This seat was seldom filled by another, even when asthma and growing infirmities kept its occupant at home, and if by any chance a thoughtless youth, regardless of the rule, made free with it, he was apt to find too many eyes upon him to sit there for long with any comfort.

As Song-peh aged, asthma troubled him greatly, and confined him first to the house, then to his bed. His strength failed and he suffered from drowsiness, but at the mention of old days his eye would flash and his fingers throw themselves into dramatic gestures as he plunged into the oft-told story of the past. As the interest grew, he would sit up in bed, and finally forsake it for the floor, his languor falling from him like a garment, until one saw again the man who entered the forbidden city or sped for Christ upon the Anhai road.

Through many long months the worn-out body hampered the heroic spirit, to which the discipline of weakness was a sore trial.

Towards the close of his life a friend went to

see him one afternoon, and found him lying alone in his room. Though he spoke of former days and of the companions who had gone before him, Song-peh did not sit up as usual, for he was weary. The mystery of uselessness, enforced by failing strength, lay heavy on his spirit.

"Why does the Master leave me thus a burden to myself and others?" he said. "I long for heaven; I ask Him for release. He does not come. Has Christ forgotten me?"

Before leaving the house, the visitor prayed with him according to his usual custom. On many previous occasions he had asked that God might spare Song-peh and give him many years to aid the Church with counsel and direction, but the petition shaped itself otherwise that day. "Give to Thy servant release from waiting, and receive him through the gates into the city." As the words took shape in the still room, there was that unmistakable response within the soul by which, at times, we know when our petitions have been granted.

A few days later and the strong runner reached the goal.

The place beside the pillar in the front row of the village church is occupied more often now,

for the faith of the first confessors at Anhai has come to large fruition, and the congregation overflows; but for some, whose hearts are touched by memories of the slight figure with its bowed white head, and the folding of the reverent hands, that place never will be filled.

XVI. STERLING SILVER

THERE is an irregular street which climbs a stretch of rising ground in the north quarter of Chinchew city, where women sell firewood of a morning and sweating coolies pass throughout the day. Half-way up it, to the inconvenience of passers-by, makers of vermicelli pull strips of dough into threads or hang their wares in dusky skeins to dry beneath the sun. Here is a bit of open ground on which the tiles and refuse of generations have grown into a little hill. Near this opening, upon the western side of the street, at the time of which this story tells, there stood a low-browed shop. It was a busy place; through the windows a sound of tinkling hammers mingled with wafts of resin greeted the passer-by; who, if a sudden rush and paroxysm of barking on the part of the watch-dog did not disturb his equanimity, turned instinctively to see Siong-lai, the silversmith, his queue wound tightly about his

head, at work among his apprentices and craftsmen.

He was a man of slight build, with a pale complexion and prominent teeth, but, in spite of plain features, his was a pleasant face, that carried brightness with it everywhere. His personality was felt throughout the dusky shop, chiming with the ringing metal and swaying the active arms and fingers of the workmen, showing where the youngest hand was burnishing a finished buckle at the counter's edge, and reaching even to the penetralia within, where the 'hang the clothes'[1] was occupied with a mother's cares.

Each morning early, Siong-lai arranged the day's work for his men, laying out silver to be beaten thin upon the anvil, choosing wax moulds for the embossers, providing wire and strips of metal for wrought designs. A little later he called the apprentices to prepare the first repast, a few mouthfuls of rice gruel, taken to avoid working on an empty stomach, to be followed by a more substantial meal, eaten about ten o'clock in the forenoon. When these preparations had been completed, the labours of the day began.

Much of Siong-lai's trade consisted in the

[1] Periphrasis used to describe a wife in China.

fashioning of wrought silver which should be inlaid with the turquoise feathers of the great king-fisher and pieced together into headgear for the women of the district. In the afternoons he delivered finished work to his customers among the jewellers of the city and took fresh orders. When he returned from these rounds, there were purchases to be made, the evening meal to be eaten, and the day's tasks to be taken over from the men and carefully examined. Then the abacus was lifted from its peg and laid beside the ledger, a fresh supply of ink rubbed down on the stone inkstand, and accounts were struck to a rattling accompaniment, as the hard wood beads of the counting-frame were shot along the wires.

"Have you eaten to the full, brother Siong-lai?" said a middle-aged man, in quick staccato tones, blinking his eyes as he shuffled into the shop, his toes turned in and the uppers of his shoes much flattened at the heel.

"I have eaten fully, uncle Sang, but pray sit down and have a smoke," said the silversmith, leaving his wooden stool and placing a chair for the visitor.

Sang-peh lifted his queue from the shoulder, where it had been placed for convenience in walking, and threw it with a slight jerk behind his back, as he accepted the proffered pipe and sat down.

"How is trade?" said he.

"It might be better."

"Come with me to the 'worship hall' and hear the true doctrine."

"I have no leisure for that sort of thing to-day, uncle Sang. What is this book which you have in your hand?"

"It is full of songs which we use in our worship."

"Why, it is printed in our Han characters,"[1] said Siong-lai, glancing at it.

"Quite so, and if you will look over my shoulder, I will read the first one to you."

Siong-lai drew his stool closer to the visitor's chair and listened as he began—

> "God made the earth and formed the skies,
> All things beneath His might arise,
> Great is His glory, great His fame,
> Through life let each His praise proclaim."

Sang-peh read through the verses slowly, explaining them as best he could, and answering the questions with which his friend plied him at every pause. After a short time, however, Siong-lai's attention slackened, but he took the blue-covered volume out

[1] Han ji, a name derived from the dynasty of Han, used by the people for Chinese characters.

of his visitor's hands, and looked at it with a certain polite interest.

"How many pieces are there in the book?" he asked, carelessly turning over the pages.

"Fifty-nine," said Sang-peh, pointing to the numeral at the side of the last hymn.

"Why are there only fifty-nine? Would not sixty be a fitting number?"

"Only fifty-nine have been printed as yet."

"Why does not someone write another to make the number even?" persisted Siong-lai, adding jauntily, "Though I know nothing of letters, I will write one for you myself, if you will leave me your song-book for a pattern."

Sang-peh smiled incredulously, but left the book, made his adieux, and went down the street.

Siong-lai found that he had set himself a task even more troublesome than the fashioning of ba-li[1] flower patterns in metal, but he had a clever friend in the scholar who kept a school for boys next door. With his help he studied the little book, picking out phrases here and there, which he pieced together into verses, much as he would have built up an ornament out of plates and curves of silver. The scholar and other friends corrected what he wrote,

[1] White jasmine.

and at last the lines were finished and copied out in neat writing.

Sang-peh was astonished when his friend hailed him from the shop one day soon after this, and asked him to come in and look at the sixtieth hymn. He praised Siong-lai's work, and obtained leave to carry off the verses to show them to some of his friends.

The silversmith's whimsical love of round numbers had unexpected consequences. The process of searching for phrases and rearranging them into stanzas had fixed his mind upon things which filled him with a new interest. Who was this Ia-so of whom the book spoke? His friend the scholar said that the K'ang-hsi dictionary[1] described him as a Sage worshipped by barbarians in the West. But Sang-peh's book said more than this. It told how he loved men and how, as might have been expected, men took advantage of this amiable weakness and killed him. None of the Ancient Sages had acted in this way, yet there was something in the book that woke a curious interest in the doings of this man.

Before long Sang-peh paid another visit to the busy shop beside the low hill, where thistles and couch grass blister on the tiles beneath the sun.

[1] The standard dictionary compiled in the seventeenth century for the Emperor K'ang-hsi.

第陸拾首

耶穌傳教真理福音
七日安息一齊來敬
耶穌代人贖咱罪過
懇求聖神時時照顧
我心着來就近耶穌
立心正道照行法度

欽敬耶穌

萬邦萬國萬民着欽
賜咱福氣自天降臨
朝夕我心口念耶穌
不可錯悞直入迷途
永勉沉輪地獄艱苦
堅心信主就是天路

'THE SIXTIETH HYMN.'

To his delight, Siong-lai went quietly off with him to hear the new doctrine. There were many people in the 'worship hall' when they reached it, and their behaviour was different from anything Siong-lai had seen before. Everyone was very quiet. The silversmith sat down on a green wooden bench and turned to glance at his neighbour. The man looked straight in front of him towards the platform where the teacher was standing. How strange everything was in this place! Why were the people sitting whilst their master stood?

Presently the worshippers stood up, a voice sounded, and the congregation burst into singing. Sang-peh thrust the familiar blue book into his hand and pointed to one of its pages. This, then, was what the verses were used for; people said them out together in a singing tone, much as blind beggars chanted ballads, only the sound of it was less pleasing, if anything. By and by the singing ceased and the people sat down again. Then the teacher shut his eyes and began to speak in a slightly unnatural voice. Nobody answered him. Siong-lai's neighbours had their eyes shut and their heads down. They were very still, and the teacher went on talking in the same uncomfortable, awesome way. The sound was different from the muttering of an idol medium when

the god was supposed to be speaking through him, but perhaps the spirit of the foreign gods spoke in an unfamiliar accent. Siong-lai felt uneasy, and would have left the building had not courtesy to Sang-peh restrained him.

By and by there was reading out of a book—a foreign 'holy book' which he did not understand. Sang-peh put on his horn-rimmed spectacles and followed the reading in a copy of the book which he had with him, but though Siong-lai looked over the page, he made little of it. Then the teacher spoke, and some of the things he said were interesting; but the talking went on for a long time, and Siong-lai began to wonder what his apprentices were doing, and whether Tui-ah would spoil that ear-ring he had given him to finish. At last, however, the lesson came to an end and there was more singing. Siong-lai liked it better than before, for he could follow the words in the book a little. Finally, the teacher stood up and spoke some wish that the Supreme Ruler might be with all the people; then everybody left the benches and streamed out of the place.

In the court outside the church they met a man whom Sang-peh hailed as Ba-hia. This man was very civil, so courteous indeed that Siong-lai began

to wonder whether he might not have some ulterior motive. But Sang-peh, noticing his uneasiness, nodded reassuringly, as if to say, 'It's all right; this is a friend of mine.' Ba-hia had a good deal of loose hair about his head, as though he had plaited his queue in a hurry that morning. His forehead puckered into horseshoe wrinkles above the bridge of the nose, and his eyes were deep-set and gleaming. The clothes he wore were shabby and he had old shoes upon his feet, but there was a quiet power about him and a manner that made one think of one's mother. After a few minutes' chat, he brought the two friends into a little room opening off the front court of the 'worship hall,' where he made tea and gave it to them. Then producing rice and salted fish, he began arranging them upon a small table. Siong-lai, alarmed by so much civility, tried to decline this hospitality, but after several fruitless efforts he yielded to persuasion and sat down to lunch with his new friends.

Ba-hia, who had heard of the sixtieth hymn, soon began to speak about the Lord Ia-so, of whom Siong-lai was so anxious to hear. His words were simple, but they made one see what he was talking about, and he could explain difficulties in a wonderful manner.

Siong-lai went home that afternoon feeling that

BA HIA ON A PREACHING TOUR.

much he had seen and heard was beyond his grasp, but greatly impressed by the friendly way in which he had been treated at the 'worship hall.' The familiar South Street seemed to have opened, as the creek did to the fisherman in the fable, and let him into a new world where people were kind to one another, a region unlike the pushing, selfish life in which he had been reared. Such an experience was pleasant to remember, and the thought of it lingered in his heart throughout the intervening days until Sang-peh came again to take him to church.

Siong-lai met with a warm welcome upon making his second visit to the South Street. Ba-hia singled him out after the morning service and began to talk to him. How gentle, how wise he was, how he drew the heart! When he talked of sin,—a foolish subject to choose for conversation, no doubt,—Siong-lai, who had been inclined at first to laugh, felt more ashamed and frightened than he would have cared to own; when he spoke of the Western Sage who did so much for men and suffered so sadly at their hands, a lump came into his throat which refused to be swallowed.

After this, the silversmith was conscious of some change in himself: he did not understand what, but was sure he must return to his new friends for

more instruction. Ba-hia's words were like milk to a hungry child; the more one drank, the more one longed to drink. He went repeatedly to talk with him. The love that spoke, however imperfectly, through the brotherhood at the 'worship hall' appealed to him, and he obeyed its call. Doubts which had troubled him at first faded away. His sunny nature found trust easy. The Saviour drew him, and he *loved* his way into the truth, with the sure instinct of the heart, his mind following in a quiet, slow way. He spoke to others of the gladness he had found: in the shop, upon the street, in neighbours' homes, wherever he was, he spoke of it. He could not help doing so; you might as well have ordered light to cease from shining as have told this simple soul to keep from publishing its joy.

Siong-lai learned half of what he knew by helping others. Kindness filled his nature. It was as though the Christian love which impressed him at the first interview with Ba-hia had formed the mould from which the new life took character and shape within him. Winsomeness, despite a plain exterior and very ordinary gifts, clung to him like a benediction and made him an attractive messenger of Christ.

Sang-peh's satisfaction in persuading Siong-lai to

his way of thinking, was modified as it gradually appeared that, whilst he could talk more fluently about religion, his pupil carried it better into practice. By and by the learner noticed little things in his friend's behaviour which did not fit with what he said. He wondered, but made no remark, doubting his ability to judge a man who knew so much more than himself. One worship day Sang-peh did not call at the shop. Siong-lai, thinking he must be ill, sought for him at his house after the services were over. But, to his surprise, when he got there he found him in his workroom, busy amid shavings, chiselling wooden heels for women's shoes. On noticing the silversmith's astonishment, Sang-peh explained that what he was doing was a matter of necessity, and talked cleverly enough to convince a mandarin on the bench. In spite of these explanations, his visitor felt uncomfortable, and soon left him. Fresh signs of declension followed, and Sang-peh's place at the 'worship hall' was almost always occupied by other people. Siong-lai, though troubled and at a loss to understand such inconsistencies, did not waver in his allegiance to the new faith. His union with the living Lord carried him through the shock occasioned by his quondam teacher's strange defection, and he went on his way unshaken.

Siong-lai's wife and mother did not approve of his fondness for barbarian ways of worship, and there was a battle when he began to take his little girl with him to the 'worship hall.' The child went willingly, and her father sent her to the Christian school, where she quickly learned to read. She loved music, and filled the house with singing. Her grandmother grumbled at the girl's being sent to study with people who would not allow her feet to be bound after the city fashion, predicting that it would affect the family prosperity; for no one would marry his son to a woman with big feet. But the dame, in spite of all her scolding, was proud of the child's acquirements, listening, if she thought she could do so unobserved, to the hymns so often on her grand-daughter's lips. This Christian singing was different from anything the heathen woman had ever heard. It refreshed her spirit like drops of fresh water falling into a stagnant pool.

"Jesus loves me, this I know,
For the Bible tells me so;
Little ones to Him belong,
They are weak, but He is strong."

The clear notes rang through the dusky rooms and out into the shop, where the chink of the tinkling hammers almost drowned it.

"What was that you were singing?" asked the old woman, hoping to hear the song again, whilst pretending not to like it all the while.

"Yes, Jesus loves me,
Yes, Jesus loves me:"

the child voice rose in the midst of the heathen city like a fountain springing in the desert. The women forgot their scolding, and the apprentices paused in their tasks unchidden as they listened.

"Yes, Jesus loves me,
The Bible tells me so."

"The barbarian songs are good to hear," said a neighbour, strolling in and seating himself on the bench beside the door.

"Siong-lai would do better if he left the barbarians and their teaching well alone, uncle," answered the old woman as she shuffled over the cracked red tiles to offer a cup of tea to her visitor.

"But how has a child like this learned to chant songs so skilfully, venerable grandmother?"

"Chant songs indeed; you should hear her reading!" the dame broke in, pride overcoming prejudice for the moment. The girl was called and set to read aloud from her red-bound Testament, and the guest,

impressed by such a prodigy, left presently, declaring that the words of the foreign holy book were reasonable after all.

One day there was consternation in Siong-lai's home. The plague, which had been devastating the city, had entered the house and struck down his daughter. The fevered child spoke of her Father in heaven and of the Lord who loved little children. Sometimes she fancied herself in church, again she was pressing her mother to worship God, or talking to her grandmother; all unconscious of the women weeping by the bed, or of her father standing with red eyes in the doorway.

"Jesus loves me, this I . . ."

The little voice would ring for a moment, then quaver and cease, to begin once more and sink in whispers. The song rippled and broke in the dark chamber like waters sapped by drought; too soon, alas! to vanish from the fountain where they had just begun to flow.

A change came before the end. The dying girl lay quiet. She saw her parents weeping and her grandmother mute with the sorrow of the aged, which has spent its tears.

"Why are you crying?" she asked gently.

"She is come to life again, she will recover," whispered the mother.

"She is dying," said the old woman fiercely in her grief, wise with the bitter wisdom of years and disappointment.

"Do not cry, father," continued the child; "I am going to the heavenly hall to be with our Lord Ia-so. You will follow by and by. Mother, granny, you will go to the church with father, and learn to love God?"

"Yes, yes, we will," sobbed the women.

Sang-peh, who had heard of the approaching end, and had come to the house after the friendly Chinese fashion, which never leaves its neighbours alone in joy or sorrow, entered the room.

"She talks of heaven. The child knows more than we do. She is going to God. Hear how she speaks!" he whispered, his nature moved to its shallow depths. The teacher from next door was there too among the neighbours, and felt the spell, as the young life spoke its last clear message, and then was still.

When his friends saw Siong-lai on the morning after the funeral, he met their condolences with glad words.

"My little one is with God," he said. "She

died so happy that I would not call her back again."

The black marks seamed beneath his eyes and the drawn, white look upon his face showed how greatly he had suffered, but there was unconquered brightness in his smile.

"She is more to me than ten sons, God used her so before she passed away. By speaking as she did of heaven and of the Saviour, she influenced the neighbours, whom I never could persuade to come to church. She has been a help to many: Sang-peh, her grandmother, her mother, and myself."

Sang-peh, though stimulated for a time by the sincerity of the dying child, fell back again into careless ways. Attracted by the doctrine of the new faith, he shrank from the sacrifices for which it called, and had never cut himself entirely free from the heathen interests which surrounded him. The practice of quack medicine, which he added to his craft of wooden heel-making, brought considerable profits with it and many entanglements. Trouble fell upon his family, and instead of being chastened by it, he steeled his heart and drifted farther away. Siong-lai, possessing less head knowledge, grew by simple trust and a loving

selflessness which everyone discovered but himself Thus when sorrow came, it softened and refined him, whilst his wiser neighbour was hardened.

Song-goan-ko, the master workman, left his web of silken net upon the loom, and throwing a word to his apprentice, stepped over the threshold board and walked down the street towards Siong-lai's shop. Meeting Sang-peh by the way, he paused for a moment's conversation.

"You should worship the Supreme Ruler, Song-goan-ko," said Sang-peh.

"What, the Pearly Emperor? Why, I . . ."

"No, no; you must understand," broke in the other hurriedly. "I do not mean the Taoist god, but the God our fathers worshipped long ago."

"Why, the Emperor serves him; what have the common people got to do with such matters?"

"Men are heaven-born, and ought to serve their Heavenly Father with filial piety."

"True, there is reason in what you say."

"Well, then, come to the 'worship hall' to-morrow, and hear more about these things."

"Yes, I will, of course I will, Sang-peh. I pray you to be seated," and with this good-bye he pursued his way.

After a few moments' conversation upon business matters at Siong-lai's shop, the old man was about to leave when his host remarked—

"I wish you would forsake the worship of useless idols and join us in serving the Supreme Ruler."

"Why, certainly I will," said Song-goan-ko, smothering his surprise with an extra burst of insincere politeness, and off he went. Turning eastwards, he passed the barber's shop with its trellised vine, and looked in to see Mr. Hap, the candied fruit merchant in New Street. His business there was soon completed, and he was leaving when his gossip said, "Will you go with me to worship the Supreme Ruler to-morrow?" Song-goan-ko's native politeness did not forsake him, and he accepted the third invitation with the effusiveness of a Chinese man of the world.

When he left Hap-ko's shop, however, the old gentleman felt much impressed by the fact that each of the three men with whom he had first spoken after leaving the house that day had asked him to do the same thing. A heathen, accustomed at times to draw omens from chance expressions of other people, he saw something remarkable in the circumstance, and going to the 'worship hall' next day, came under Ba-hia's spell. Siong-lai

welcomed him with joy and took him to the hospital, where in course of time he was cured of the opium habit, and joined the brotherhood.

Another friend whom our hero succeeded in winning to the new faith was Si-sai, a silversmith like himself. He was a curious-looking man about forty years of age, with a long nose, soft brown eyes, and a distrait demeanour. In addition to his everyday occupation, Si-sai used to act as a medium, being called in to write prescriptions for sick people, under the supposed influence of the idols. Sacrifices were offered upon these occasions before the image, which had been carried into the sick chamber, incense and paper money were burned, and then Si-sai and another medium, each taking one arm of a Y-shaped divining rod in his left hand, allowed the straight part of it to move in planchette fashion upon the surface of a table. A doctor skilled in such matters meanwhile following the movements of the stick upon the table, and noting the characters which it was supposed to write, prescribed accordingly for the invalid's benefit.

Si-sai was a weak-looking, impressionable man, who found it difficult to face the daily persecution and annoyance falling to the lot of those who forsake heathenism in the midst of an idolatrous

community. His former profession of spirit medium made the change doubly trying in his case, but, helped by Siong-lai and others, he held faithfully to the new creed, his friend's shining face and cheery greeting doing much to dissipate his troubles.

Another of Siong-lai's protégés was a distant relative of his own, Liong-peh, a gaunt, white-haired individual, who lived alone in a neglected temple upon a meagre pittance. Before the new love quickened Siong-lai's heart he had left the old man pretty much to himself, but now he cared for him body and soul. When he passed near the temple he would spare a minute to flash in, say a kind word or two, and, leaving a silver coin behind him to help the solitary ménage, would go away again.

The silversmith did not neglect the interests of his workmen, taking them to church whenever he could persuade them to go with him. The shop was now closed once a week, and though the men, according to the customs of the city, were paid for seven days' labour, they were free to do what they liked when Sunday came round. When the apprentices who had completed their terms set up in business for themselves in the neighbouring streets and lanes, Siong-lai followed them with interest, and did his best to bring them to share the happy life he

had discovered. There were others also whom he came upon in his journeys through the city and tried to help. Soon there was quite a flock of people for whom he thought and cared, weaving the shining thread of kindness through their lives and drawing them with gentle persistency towards higher things.

Many of Siong-lai's following had relatives, too shy or too prejudiced to join in public worship; and all of them had friends they wished to influence. This led him to try the experiment of holding gatherings in their homes. On such occasions the guest-room of the house appointed was swept and hung with lamps, benches were borrowed and arranged in rows, a table with the necessary books was set out, and tea was handed round. The women of the company sat within the open doors of the bedrooms, behind bamboo screens which hid them from the public gaze. Hymns were sung, a few words explaining some portion of Scripture were spoken, and prayers were offered for parents, husbands, wives, and children. Then parting cups of tea were drunk, pipes and lanterns were lit, and the guests made their way homewards. Thus the spirit of brotherhood, so deep in Chinese life, kindled afresh at the Christian altar and spread itself over a considerable area of the city, bringing help to many and showing how

the primitive ideal of the Church might reproduce itself among the people.

The silversmith had scant leisure in his busy days, but he managed to spare one afternoon a week for the work of carrying the gospel to others or for visiting the sick and needy in their homes. At midnight, after his accounts were made up and the family in bed, he used to trim his lamp and steal an hour to read God's Word and pray. Without the secret succour of those lonely hours, his happy life were impossible.

Meanwhile, the hammers clinked and rang in the shop, and the business grew so much that it was moved to a larger building farther up the street. Siong-lai had the joy of seeing his wife and mother join him in the worship of God, for his daughter's dying message had not been in vain. A son was born to him, and his cup was full. His constitution, however, never robust, had been seriously weakened during his heathen days; and though he often spoke of how his life had been prolonged for years by the self-restraint and careful habits induced by Christianity, his health now gave way.

Busy to the last, Siong-lai's home-going was very sudden. As in a moment, God beckoned to him, and he rose gladly and passed with the bright look

on his face. At the close of his last day on earth he lay upon a trestle-bed near the front door of his guest-room, in the hot night air. The busy shop was silent now: the workmen had left, and the tinkling hammers lay idle on the shelves, for the master's seat was empty, and the presence which had animated the place was to return to it no more. The dying man's knees were drawn upwards as he lay, his face was blanched and shrunken, there were hollows round his eyes, and his breath came heavily and slow. In a corner of the room, as far away from him as possible, sat 'the mother of his children.'

"You are going home, my brother," said a friend, taking the thin hand which was stretched to greet him as he entered, "going home to be with Christ, which is far better than to know Him here on earth."

"Yes, to be with Christ."

"Do you trust Him as your Saviour, Siong-lai?"

"I trust Him with all my heart," came the answer in clear tones, as he looked up with the love-light in his eyes.

"Is there anything on your mind, anything you wish to ask me about, anything I can do for you?"

"Nothing, thank you. My heart is full of peace.

I trust myself and my family to God. He will care for them and me. I am going home."

The last words came heavily, and he closed his eyes. His friend beckoned to the trembling woman in the corner, and kneeling down beside the bed, commended her dying husband to Christ, praying that he might be given an abundant entrance into rest. When the prayer came to an end Siong-lai joined in with the Amen of the Chinese Church, 'Sim-saw-goan,' So my heart desires. In the morning his desire was satisfied; he had entered into the joy of his Lord.

XVII. COMMUTED VALUES

KHEK-PEH lived in a single room in a straggling native house. Surrounded by scores of neighbours, he came and went on his own errands, keeping his own counsel, in so far as it was possible to do so amidst the intricate relationships of Chinese life.

On certain days he used to leave his quarters early with carrying pole and baskets, and journey to a point where the roads meet outside the South Gate of the city. There the farmers came in the cool of the morning, with loads of sweet potatoes, to wait for customers by the causeway edge; while the dew still spangled the rice-fields on both sides of the way, here lying grey in the shadowed angles of the green leaves, there sparkling like rose diamonds in the sun. After much dispute and bargaining, he would fill his baskets and return to the city, carrying as much as eighty pounds slung on his broad shoulders; for years of coarse

fare and daily toil had failed to break his strength.

A scanty breakfast taken, the old man would set out to sell his potatoes, retailing them from house to house along the narrow streets and clustering courts of Chinchew, his burden lightening as he went. The women who came to their doors at his call knew that, hard as he was over a bargain, he gave fair measure; for the marks upon his weighing stick were true, the stone was just weight, and there was no cunning touch of hidden finger upon the beam, to make the basket seem heavier than it was, with the old pedlar.

Khek-peh's outward man bespoke slow good sense beneath a hard exterior, for, as in ganoid fishes, the bony dispositions of his character were near the surface. His head was large, with smooth tight skin above the wrinkled forehead; its few remaining hairs being drawn into the semblance of a queue, scarce big enough to carry its black tie-cord. The full eyes had hardly any eyebrows and were almost lost to view beneath lids heavily creased and folded. The nose was blunt, and the brown cheeks, mottled here and there a lighter colour, were seamed where they joined the region of the chin, and rough like weathered walnut wood. The ears were large, and

KHEK PEH.

the mouth showed a slight twist under some scattered hairs, too scanty to be called a moustache. The neck, shrunken but sinewy, had a grey mark as of an ancient scar.

Khek-peh was tall for a Chinchew man, with a slight stoop. His limbs were big, the enlarged joints and callous skin of his hands and feet showing the effects of hard work. He was a silent man, with a doglike inability to express his mind, but people greeted his rugged face with pleasure and listened attentively to his sparing words. His dress was of the simplest, consisting of a blue cotton jacket and short loose trousers.

When the day's work was over, the old man would go home to cook his evening meal. The coarsest fare sufficed for his wants. A few potatoes somewhat damaged, or too small to meet the wishes of his customers, were all he allowed himself for food. These were quickly washed and placed upon the fire. Whilst the cooking was in progress, he would keep close to the earthen furnace, feeding the flame beneath the large black pot with straw or dried fir branches, lifting the wooden cover from the cauldron after a time to probe at intervals beneath the steaming water. When the potatoes were sufficiently cooked, he would place the dripping lid by the

copper's edge, against the wall, and sweeping aside the bubbling scum from the surface, with a deft motion of his crab-shell ladle, fill a bowl with hot potatoes.

Then Khek-peh sat down to his lonely supper, the stone ledge outside the door providing him a seat on summer evenings, a wooden trestle, or his bed, serving the same purpose in wintry weather. When the meal was ended, after rinsing his bowl and chopsticks, he would carefully sweep the earthen floor.

Now followed the luxury of tobacco, smoked a pinch at a time in a bamboo pipe. The old man would sit with an expressionless face slowly rolling a spill of yellow paper, which he lit, leaving it to smoulder; then, thrusting his fingers into a leather pouch, he took a minute quantity of tobacco and placed it in the shallow bowl of his long pipe. Now, pursing his lips, with a sharp puff he blew the smouldering roll of paper into a flame and lit his pipe, extinguishing the flame immediately after, and leaving the spill to smoulder as before. After two or three whiffs he knocked out the tobacco ashes on a stone and grasped the pouch once more. At last, the busy idleness of the dilatory Chinese pipe at an end, he would turn to other things.

When the door of the pedlar's room was bolted for the night, the day's earnings were counted over with a scrupulous care that left no coin untested. There was a box beneath the bed, in which a percentage of the daily profits, however small, was placed by the side of a growing roll of silver dollars and the title-deeds of a shop acquired by years of painful trading. This box was the shrine of Khek-peh's worship; it held his idol.

It was a supreme moment when, the toils of the day well ended, the wooden chest was drawn from its hiding-place and opened. The unreasoning delight of mere possession took hold of the old man as the shining silver slipped through his fingers and the precious outcome of his labours took tangible shape before his eyes. He was a child again. The worn box, the squalid room, his toils and losses, the sordid shifts and dire economies of years, were all forgotten in a wondering joy that blew away the ashes of a lifetime, leaving the ingot of his gains exposed to view. It was a moment fraught with still excitement, that never staled upon the slow nature, nor failed to bring it under the immediate dominion of a passion which stirred its dormant powers to full self-consciousness. The long hours of drudgery looked forward to it; the lost years

were found again in its increase. For this the solitary toiler lived hard, scanting himself of food and clothing. It was the drop deliriously sweet at the bottom of his daily cup.

Khek-peh lived this life of penurious toil for many a monotonous year, until his hair was whiter than the dollars in his growing hoard. He had already passed the limit of threescore years when strange rumours began to spread among the neighbours. Barbarians had come to the city, who spoke of life beyond the grave and called common folk to worship the Supreme Ruler, in whose presence Wen Wang serves on high. It was most perplexing, and bad too, no doubt; for had not all the world been warned by the Sacred Edict to beware of strange doctrines?

Khek-peh was soon to make experiment of the new teaching for himself. Happening to suffer from an ailment which often troubled him, he sought advice from the foreign doctor. The barbarian was strangely kind, and the treatment did him good; whilst in the hospital chapel he heard words which stirred his heart and made him wish they might be true. Besides, there were folk there, Chinchew people like himself, who understood these words and could explain them, and how could one

'who did not even know the character for nail'[1] dispute with folk on matters of religion?

The old man found healing for both soul and body at the hospital. Light dawned on the dim spirit, the intractable stony nature woke to life; a new love trembled into being, and he was changed. The lust of gain, however, died hard, and though it lessened as he grew in knowledge, it cost him many a struggle. The wrinkled face was the same, but a lamp new kindled shone behind it. The inner man, closely walled round by inveterate reserve, scarce showed itself; yet the folk who bought his wares began to feel a difference in his way of bargaining. "It is age," they said; "the old grow gentler with the passing years."

In course of time Khek-peh was received into the Church of Christ. He plied his business keenly as before, but found perhaps less pleasure in the chest beneath the bed. As the new interests invaded his life, they slowly changed the old. A book now occupied many leisure moments, for he would sit and con a hymn at night, spelling out the words with clumsy finger.

The brethren of the West Street Church found a faithful spirit beneath the heavily built exterior of

[1] One of the simplest of the Chinese characters.

our hero. Khek-peh did not know much, but his life was consistent with what he knew: his judgment was sound, his rare words carried weight with them; and so, in course of time, he was chosen for the sacred office of the eldership.

It was a moving sight to see the old man standing before the pulpit in the presence of the congregation on the day of his ordination. The aged yet stalwart figure, the solid head, the weathered neck and countenance, the reverent mien, were strangely eloquent. His homespun cotton clothes were scrupulously clean, and his stockingless feet had been thrust into cheap shoes, the gnarled toes showing strongly beneath the black cloth uppers. The artless gesture of the thick brown hands laid on his chest marked a devotion none the less real because less clearly seen in the opaque features of a face unskilled to register emotion.

Very humbly and sincerely the vows were taken, and the simple heart threw itself on Christ for strength to bear the charge assigned to it. The worn face dropped lower as the people stood to pray, and the act performed on earth was sealed in heaven.

As of old, Khek-peh said little, but in his humble way he served the Church. None knew the battles

which he fought within his soul. Years passed away, his faults seeming to those who knew them best to be slowly moulded, with a fascinating sureness of absorption, into lowly virtues: the native hardness of his disposition lending firmness to his faith, his stolid caution changing into saintly circumspection, his obstinacy to patience, his love of self to a deep, dumb love for Christ. The chief weakness, that rankling avarice which had pierced his life, if hardest to subdue, showed the noblest change of all, gathering about itself in magic transformation the unsuspected lustre of a real but hidden devotion.

One day Ngo Sien-si, the native minister of the West Street Church, called upon a friend in Chinchew with a message from Khek-peh.

"You see," he said, "Khek-peh wishes to give his savings for God's work, and he has asked me to speak to you about the matter."

"For what object," asked the other, "does he wish to give his money?"

"He desires you to say," replied the minister.

"Why not give it to the poor?" said his friend, thinking that the old man, who lived so hardly and went so scantily clad, could have but little to bestow.

"I don't think that Khek-peh would agree to that."

"Would it not be better to leave the matter open for the present? The old man is over eighty. Why should he not keep his savings by him in case of sickness, or of other need? Afterwards, in the natural course of things, as he has no relatives, he may bequeath his money to the Church."

"I fear he will not consent to do so, but I shall ask him to consider what you have said."

Next day the good man returned with the news that Khek-peh's mind was made up to give the money without delay.

"But what will he do if laid aside from work, Mr. Ngo?"

"He says that God will care for him as in the past, and that he is quite strong enough to earn his living still."

"Well, I suppose the sum is but a small one, and the old man ought to follow his own mind in disposing of it."

"It amounts to six hundred dollars," said the minister.

"Six hundred dollars!" gasped the other, in amazement. "Why, no one would imagine that Khek-peh had six hundred cash to give away."

"Yes, he looks very poor; but he has worked

hard all his life, living on beggar's fare and spending almost nothing on himself. The money has been his idol, and now he wishes to put it away."

"He has decided to part with all his money now?" queried the friend, almost overcome by the idea.

"Yes, he told me he had quite decided, saying, 'The Saviour gave all for me, and the least that I can do is to give something in return to Him who loved me so.'"

Love had conquered the hard nature: the lifelong treasure had been laid at Jesus' feet.

There was a pause in the conversation. Neither of the friends could speak. And in the silent room the figure of the gaunt old man, so scant of speech, with his heavy face and knotted fingers, his worn clothes and bare feet, rose up before them, and was transfigured; and the dull lineaments, and each angularity of the ungainly body, and every thread of the mean raiment, spoke of Him whose love can change all human dross to gold.

EPILOGUE

CHINA—not the willow-pattern country of our conventional ideas, but the living, palpitating, human China—cannot be grasped by means of maps and general descriptions. By studying the lives of individuals we come to understand another race more easily than when we consider it as a whole, just as we learn the quality and action, the colour and effect, of sea-water better from the waves that curve and fall upon the shore than from allowing the eye to wander over the wide ocean.

China in legend and in story is an interesting land. Its men and women think and love, labour and sorrow, and grow old, as we do.

The process has begun within the Middle Kingdom by which nation after nation, under the impact of the world-embracing faith, has laid its characteristic contribution at the feet of Jesus, and whilst revealing afresh the possibilities latent in Christianity, has stood revealed more clearly to itself.

To understand the China of to-day, therefore, we must consider its growing Christianity as well as its paganism, looking not only at the page of history, but also on the breathing book of life, and specially at that thrilling chapter of transition at which it now lies open on the desk of ages.

The Master is at work in China. He knows the virtues deep within debased humanity, and how to evoke their heavenly beauty. Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, these are the colours in which He works until in some degree He begins to reveal His own likeness in changed hearts. Thus He affects the lives of men and uses them to sway the lives of others. The Church increases, tending to double its numbers every seven years.

In many a walled city and distant hamlet the Master's name is known. He comes in lowly weakness to those thronging homes of men, calling on wayward hearts to leave their pride and learn His likeness in a new humility; and men hear the call, and do Him reverence. Once, a traveller was talking with some village people gathered, as villagers in China are wont to gather, at the cool of the day, when a little child carried in a woman's arms was brought upon the scene. And as the child drew near, the elders and head-men and all the people of the place

rose from their seats and stood to welcome him. "Why do you rise to greet this little child, O venerable father?" asked the stranger, as he turned in some surprise to one of the bystanders. "Because he is the head of our family," replied the man, with simple dignity. The spirit in which the Master-worker chooses to appear on earth, the spirit of gentleness, humility and trust, the spirit of the little child, is calling men and women to their feet in China; and if we are but faithful to our charge, in spite of every adverse influence at work among them, her many myriads yet may rise and stand to own Him as the Head of their race.

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